Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/225

Treacherous Play

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Playful Thinking

Jesper Juul, Geoffrey Long, William Uricchio, and Mia Consalvo, editors

The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games, Jesper Juul, 2013

Uncertainty in Games, Greg Costikyan, 2013

Play Matters, Miguel Sicart, 2014

Works of Game: On the Aesthetics of Games and Art, John Sharp, 2015

How Games Move Us: Emotion by Design, Katherine Isbister, 2016

Playing Smart: On Games, Intelligence, and Artificial Intelligence, Julian Togelius, 2018

Fun, Taste, & Games: An Aesthetics of the Idle, Unproductive, and Otherwise Playful, John Sharp and David Thomas, 2019

Real Games: What's Legitimate and What's Not in Contemporary Video Games, Mia Consalvo and Christopher A. Paul, 2019

Achievement Relocked: Loss Aversion and Game Design, Geoffrey Engelstein, 2020

Play Like a Feminist, Shira Chess, 2020

Ambient Play, Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson, 2020

Making Games: The Politics and Poetics of Game Creation Tools, Stefan Werning, 2021

Treacherous Play, Marcus Carter, 2022

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Treacherous Play

Marcus Carter

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

© 2022 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

The MIT Press would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers who provided comments on drafts of this book. The generous work of academic experts is essential for establishing the authority and quality of our publications. We acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of these otherwise uncredited readers.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Carter, Marcus, author.
Title: Treacherous play / Marcus Carter.
Description: Cambridge, Massachusetts : The MIT Press, 2022. | Series: Playful thinking | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021000494 | ISBN 9780262046312 (hardcover)
Subjects: LCSH: Games—Psychological aspects. | Deception.
Classification: LCC GV1201.37 .C37 2022 | DDC 790.1—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021000494

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Contents

On Thinking Playfully vii

1 An Introduction to Playing Treacherously 1

2 *EVE Online*: Don't Trust Anyone! 15

3 *DayZ*: Treachery in the Zombie Apocalypse 41

4 *Survivor*: Treacherous Play as a Spectator Sport 63

5 Designing Treacherous Play 87

6 Treacherous Assumptions 97

Appendix 107
Acknowledgments 111
Notes 113
Bibliography 125
Index 135

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

On Thinking Playfully

Many people (we series editors included) find video games exhilarating, but it can be just as interesting to ponder why that is so. What do video games do? What can they be used for? How do they work? How do they relate to the rest of the world? Why is play both so important and so powerful?

Playful Thinking is a series of short, readable, and argumentative books that share some playfulness and excitement with the games that they are about. Each book in the series is small enough to fit in a backpack or coat pocket, and combines depth with readability for any reader interested in playing more thoughtfully or thinking more playfully. This includes, but is by no means limited to, academics, game makers, and curious players.

So, we are casting our net wide. Each book in our series provides a blend of new insights and interesting arguments with overviews of knowledge from game studies and other areas. You will see this reflected not just in the range of titles in our series, but in the range of authors creating them. Our basic assumption is simple: video games are such a flourishing medium that any new perspective on them is likely to show us something unseen or forgotten, including those from such

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

unconventional voices as artists, philosophers, or specialists in other industries or fields of study. These books are bridge builders, cross-pollinating both areas with new knowledge and new ways of thinking.

At its heart, this is what Playful Thinking is all about: new ways of thinking about games and new ways of using games to think about the rest of the world.

Jesper Juul
Geoffrey Long
William Uricchio
Mia Consalvo

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

1 An Introduction to Playing Treacherously

Games that are deliberately designed to enable or invite betrayal are extremely rare.

If you steal from your guild in *World of Warcraft*, the game's moderators will return the stolen goods and suspend your account. Most first-person shooter (FPS) games code away the killing of teammates by disabling "friendly fire" and structuring the competition in such a way that betraying your team would offer no in-game reward. In most tabletop games, where these types of coded rules aren't possible, trust is implicit.[1] The rules of *Monopoly* don't need to say that you must not lie or steal from other players, because deception and betrayal are just *assumed* to be an illegitimate way of playing the game. Playing treacherously is typically treated as an "off-limits" type of play that will ruin the experience of other players and is actively designed against in most multiplayer games.

Indeed, the games scholar Staffan Björk categorizes some games with deception and betrayal as examples of "feel-bad games" for the unusually negative emotions they provoke in players.[2] Björk's example is *So Long Sucker*, a simple bargaining game designed in the 1950s by the game theorists Mel Hausner, John Forbes Nash (Nobel Prize–winning economist of *A Beautiful Mind* fame), Lloyd Shapely, and Martin Shubik.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Negotiation and agreements are key to winning *So Long Sucker*, but just as in TV's *Survivor*, betrayal is also an implicit necessity for having a chance of winning. Such was the intense emotional experience of playing that Nash nicknamed the game "fuck your buddy,"[3] and Shubik later recalled "married couples going home in separate cabs" after playing.[4] I have included the rules for *So Long Sucker* in the appendix at the end of the book, if you want to test this reputation for yourself.

But why? Of all the things that seem totally appropriate to do in games, why is treacherous play so polarizing? Why is the emotional experience so exceptional?

In this book, I explore an underexplored type of play that sits on the border of what is commonly understood to be acceptable or appropriate to do in a game. It is a type of play that is not for everyone. Through case studies of games that explicitly permit betrayal, I illuminate and complicate some assumptions that scholars, designers, and players often make about the limits of competition in multiplayer games; the appeal of negative experiences; how social interactions can be a part of play; and how we draw the lines between who you are in a game, and who you are in real life. To borrow an argument from Jaakko Stenros, transgressive play *is still play*, and if we only look at "half the picture, we cannot grasp the whole phenomenon and its nuances."[5]

Here I focus specifically on the few examples of where treacherous play is *successful*. By this, I mean where it occurs within the rules of the game, and where the presence of treachery has undeniably contributed to a game's appeal and success. This includes play like yelling "Friendly! Don't shoot!" when you encounter another player in *DayZ*, but burying an ax in their head when they turn around; promising another player in *Survivor* that you will take them to the final three,

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

but then writing their name down at the next tribal council; and being a productive member of an *EVE Online* corporation while selling military secrets to its enemies. Some of the cases in this book are provocative, but they help uncover aspects of play that often get hidden, ignored, or designed away.

By looking at this other half of the picture, we can start to imagine more about what the possibilities are for this emerging medium.

Treacherous Assumptions

There are three assumptions I often see players and scholars making about treacherous play: gut reactions to the idea of betraying for fun. The purpose of this book is not to dispel these assumptions but to use them to develop a deeper understanding about treacherous play and uncover what it can contribute to how we think about games and play more broadly.

Assumption 1: Treacherous Play Is Unethical

The first assumption that I find people make about treacherous play is that using deception and betrayal for in-game advantage in a multiplayer game is—for some reason—unethical. To discuss this idea, we must first consider how competition in a game can be ethical at all.

C. Thi Nguyen, a philosopher, and José Zagal, a games scholar, have discussed the ethics of competition in multiplayer games, and what it means for a competitive game to be moral. Their starting point is to acknowledge that direct competition in games does involve a form of violence against an opponent, albeit in a highly abstracted form. In a strict Kantian sense, this means that all forms of competition are morally wrong,[6] but as Nguyen and Zagal argue, "some forms

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

of competition seem clearly ethical."[7] They volunteer the term "mere violence" to describe and distinguish the "forms of violence that are not significant," where such forms are limited in significance to preventing an opponent's in-game plans, by the means permitted by the rules.

The standard view in the philosophy of sport is that the two key principles of consent and agreement make competition ethical,[8] but Nguyen and Zagal usefully extend this rubric through Bernard Suit's principle of the *lusory goal*: the in-game goal we establish *that is contingent on* a series of unnecessary obstacles.[9] More than just consent, the struggle against these obstacles is what we desire from competitive games. If my only goal was to beat you at poker, I might use a stacked deck to ensure that I win, circumventing those unnecessary obstacles. Here, though, I would no longer just be committing mere violence against your goal of winning but committing violence against your lusory goal and the unnecessary obstacles it is contingent on. For Nguyen and Zagal, the ethics of the transformation of the violence of competition in multiplayer games is contingent on "the way the game's design aligns my mere violence with your desire for struggle."[10]

Consider *Fortnite*, a battle royale first-person shooter game where up to one hundred players compete to survive on a virtual island. Play is characterized by a few one-on-one battles as players are forced into a smaller and smaller zone with the lusory goal (and the way to win *Fortnite*) of being the last player standing, having overcome the obstacles that the other ninety-nine players represent. To kill me in *Fortnite* is to deny me the opportunity to win (an act of "mere violence"), but attempting to kill me is necessary for my lusory goal. To play *Fortnite* on a private server with no opponents is not to play *Fortnite* at all.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

This is a useful lens to start interrogating treacherous play, because it helps us understand how betrayal is unethical in most games. Players who steal from a rival guild in *World of Warcraft* are not aligning their violence with their opponents' desire for struggle, since trusting correctly is not an unnecessary obstacle *World of Warcraft*. This is not the case in the games we explore in this book, where betrayal crucially falls within the rules of the game. Trust, and not misplacing trust, is perhaps the primary unnecessary obstacle that the lusory goal of *Survivor* is contingent on. The informal number one rule of *EVE* is "DON'T TRUST ANYONE," and the developers frequently reference the presence of treacherous play in game trailers and advertisements. The way each game works, explicitly and implicitly, to establish betrayal as an expected obstacle is crucial to understanding its appeal and experience.

Yet even in games where treacherous play falls within the rules, betrayed players often have disproportionately negative reactions. *DayZ* players who are killed in a gunfight rarely react as angrily as when they are betrayed by a trusted ally, even though the "mere violence" toward their game goals is the same. What is it that distinguishes losing by betrayal from losing by another part of the contest of the game? Iris Bohnet and Richard Zeckhauser are behavioral economists at Harvard University who identified the phenomenon of *betrayal aversion*. Their research has found that people are more reluctant to trust another person—which involves taking a social risk—than to take an equivalent form of natural risk, such as playing a game of chance. Their work suggests that this is because betrayal incurs an additional loss, a negative emotional experience, because people care about *how* outcomes come to be, not just *what* the outcome is. This observation can be illuminating, and in subsequent chapters I explore the application

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

of this theory to better understand some of the experiences that players have with treacherous play.

But does the highly negative experience associated with betrayal mean that it cannot ever be simply "mere violence" to betray someone? Answering this question requires us to explore how highly negative experiences can be part of play. As Jesper Juul notes, failure in games is something of a paradox.[11] We generally try to avoid failure, but we seek it out in games, and games that are too easy are often not very appealing. Particularly through the examples in chapter 3 of the high consequence of death in *DayZ*, I draw on Michael J. Apter's *reversal theory* and Dolf Zillmann's *excitation transfer effect* to better understand how negative emotions like anger, horror, and fear can be enjoyed, and why betrayal might, paradoxically, be something we seek out in play.[12]

Assumption 2: Treacherous Play Is Antisocial

The second assumption made about treacherous play is that it is antisocial. What I mean here is that people often assume that the presence of deception and betrayal is antithetical to positive social relationships in a game, or that treacherous play is just another form of the antisocial griefing or trolling that pervades online game cultures.[13]

This is important because a core appeal of multiplayer games is the social experience. We play with our friends and make new friends online through our play. The broad interdisciplinary research into the success of *World of Warcraft*—a MMOG (massively multiplayer online game) that at one time had over twelve million monthly subscribers—found that the social relationships and experiences players built with strangers and real friends were essential to the game's success.[14] To players of online games like *World of Warcraft*, their relationships with

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

the people they play with are equivalent to real-world friendships, and just as valuable. Yet *EVE Online*, also a subscription-based MMOG, has a rich social community even though trust and social relationships are a commodity in the game. In chapter 2, I explore this seeming contradiction further.

Earlier research has often assumed that treacherous play is a form of griefing; scamming and stealing from other players are often conflated with griefing or trolling or simply identified as another type of "being an ass."[15] Griefing is a widespread phenomenon in games where people do things specifically to annoy other players, and in most cases such behavior violates the terms of service of online games. The goal of a griefer is to get a negative reaction, and often to share this reaction with others. Treacherous play would seem to fit this description, since it is often associated with extremely negative reactions, but is this still the case where treachery falls within the rules of the game, is expected, and is even encouraged? *EVE* scammers, *DayZ* players, and *Survivor* competitors don't betray to annoy their competitors. They betray to get ahead, to survive in the game, and, in *Survivor*, to win the million-dollar prize. In chapter 3, I draw on my research into *DayZ* play to unpack some of the differences—and similarities—between grief play and treacherous play to further explore the ways social interactions are, and can be, part of play.

Jaakko Stenros points out that academic research frames griefing in many different ways, typically as a result of the disciplinary background of the scholars.[16] In some cases, griefing is pathologized and diagnosed like cyberbullying. In others, griefers are painted as problem users, undesirable side effects of online games to be minimized by better design. Yet approaching play as something that should always be positive obfuscates the similarities and limits our understanding

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

of play as a broader phenomenon with both positive and negative effects. Taking treacherous play seriously as play does not disregard its potential negative impacts or its similarity to the endemic toxicity of game culture but acknowledges and seeks to explore the fact that in *some* games, for *some* people, treachery has an appeal.

Assumption 3: Treacherous Players Are Bad People

The third assumption I often encounter in discussions about treacherous play involves expectations about the treacherous players and what they must be like. To play treacherously, this assumption suggests, is to reflect who you are in real life: a dishonest *Diplomacy* player is dishonest in real life.[17] And look, I'll admit, if I found out that my accountant spent their leisure time running a fraudulent Ponzi-style bank in *EVE*, even I would probably get a little nervous.

This is an interesting assumption to explore, because what does your play really say about who you are? When we play games, we engage in an enormous range of immoral, unpleasant, and otherwise illegal practices that we are rarely judged for. Playing *Red Dead Redemption*, I spent hours hunting down rare and endangered species to unlock awards and experience. Yet anyone who plays games would not assume anything about my feelings toward animals based on this behavior. I have captured and fought animals, cockfight style, in *Pokémon* games; I've executed thousands of captured prisoners in nearly every *Total War* battle I've ever won; and I've committed countless instances of vehicular manslaughter in *Grand Theft Auto*. Play can be transgressive. Yet people rarely make claims about who we are based on how we play.

Even if (as I discuss in chaps. 2 and 3) we can distinguish treacherous play from play like griefing, even where such play

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

is within the rules and well established, being dishonest is still derided. *Survivor* players often come up against this attitude at "Final Tribal Council," the final event where a jury of eliminated players vote for which remaining player should win the season. Trapped on a remote island, only knowing their opponents based on how they have played the game, jurors attempt to devalue players based on their acts of deception and betrayal being indicative of who they are in real life, and therefore not being deserving of the prize. This is why *Survivor* makes a great case discussion, as the high-stakes debates expose the ways we assume someone's play style reflects their character.

Central to this discussion is that betrayal in treacherous play involves an undefined player choice. Many games feature deception; deceiving your opponent is one of the main "unnecessary obstacles" in games like poker, and explicitly lying to opponents about your intentions and then betraying them is core to games like *Werewolf* and the recent wildly successful impostor game *Among Us*.[18] The crucial difference is that players of poker and *Werewolf* are following the formal role that the game has placed them in as opponents. What is unusual about treacherous games is that they give the player the responsibility of choosing whether or not to betray, and whom to betray. You are not assigned the role of impostor, and it is possible to play *DayZ*, *EVE Online*, and *Survivor* without the use of deception and betrayal (otherwise why would you ever trust me?).

Consequently, treacherous players have a greater responsibility over their in-game actions, leading to the highly negative emotional experience of betrayal. But what does this tell us about a player's real-life morality? Scholars like Miguel Sicart argue that playing a game is an act of moral interpretation: of

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

being a human being, but also of being a player with particular goals, within a specific game system and game community. Giving players the responsibility to choose what is right or wrong, as treacherous play does, forces players to engage with the morality of the game and their actions. For this reason, Sicart considers *EVE Online* an example of a game closest to "ethical soundness," because of the way it affords players ethical choice.[19] This does not mean only immoral people choose immoral options in games, but acknowledges that all play involves a process of negotiating the morality of actions within the moment-to-moment moral subjectivity of play. For this reason, I sought out these treacherous players to better understand who these people are and why they choose to play this way, offering insight into what the choices we make in games mean about who we are.

Defining Treacherous Play

So far, I have identified the three assumptions that pervade discussions of treacherous play and go some way in explaining why it is so unusual, and what makes it such an interesting case study. These are the following:

1. Treacherous play is unethical.
2. Treacherous play is antisocial, like griefing or trolling.
3. Treacherous players are bad people.

I have touched on what these assumptions seem to be claiming about treacherous play, and throughout the book, I use them to help interrogate the phenomenon of treacherous play in depth and uncover what it can contribute to how we think about games and play more broadly. In this way, *Treacherous Play* pushes the boundaries of how we might typically think

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

about playing games with other people, and what can be enjoyable in a game.

At this point, it is useful to establish a clear definition of what we're talking about in this book, and what we're not:

> Treacherous play is the *lawful* use of *deception* to *betray* another person in a *multiplayer game* by *choice*, where it provides *in-game advantage*.

To unpack, in the cases I explore, treacherous play is not a form of cheating, because it is *lawful*, that is, it falls within the rules of the games I discuss. While *deception* features in a variety of games, treacherous play also requires that the player be given the *choice* to betray, or not to betray, which has a material impact on its experience. As discussed earlier, I also focus only on examples where such play provides the betrayer *in-game advantage*, an important part of how I distinguish it from griefing or trolling, and I further limit the scope by discussing only *multiplayer games*, since the psychological experience of betraying, or being betrayed by, another real person is critical to the emotional experience of treacherous play.

In chapter 2, I examine the nature of treacherous play in the sci-fi MMOG *EVE Online* and how it impacts the social experience of the game. I focus on ethnographic research I did on *EVE* "scammers" and "spies"—players whose primary occupation in the sandbox game is to use deception to betray other *EVE* players for in-game reward—to provide a rich account of the appeal of playing treacherously and how treacherous play makes *EVE* successful. This is not just limited to what it is, but how it feels, the appeal, and how these players justify their actions and form fascinating codes of conducts that offer us insight into understanding treachery as a form of social, intellectual, and highly competitive play.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

In chapter 3, I discuss *DayZ*, a zombie-themed first-person shooter without codified teams where players can form ad hoc collaborations using proximity-based voice chat—my former colleague Greg Wadley described the game as a "massively multiplayer prisoner's dilemma."[20] Drawing on interviews with *DayZ* players, along with 1,700 responses to a player motivations survey, I discuss the relationships between griefing and treacherous play in *DayZ* and unpack the ways in which negative experiences can be positive in games, and a core part of their appeal. In doing so, I further explore the ethics of betrayal in the context of a complex and persistent social sandbox game.

Finally, in chapter 4, I discuss the US television series *Survivor*—perhaps the best-known example of treacherous play. Deception and betrayal are fundamental to the play of the game, but in Final Tribal Council (where eliminated players choose the winner), players' treacherousness is often used against them. The unusual mechanism of selecting the winner by a vote of losing players exposes the ways that players value (or devalue) treacherousness in *Survivor*. This chapter thus contributes an opportunity to explore the perception that playing treacherously indicates something about you in real life, and how challenging it is to draw clear boundaries between how we play and who we are.

All three of these games are what I consider to be examples of *successful* treacherous play, where the presence of treacherous play contributes to the appeal and commercial success of the game. In chapter 5, I crystallize the lessons learned about the design of these games to identify this book's contribution for game designers, a discussion about how to design for treacherous play.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Finally, in chapter 6, I return to the three assumptions in discussions about treacherous play and the question of why treachery is so rare in games. This book doesn't argue that more games should feature treachery, or try to rehabilitate it, but suggests that examining such unusual and borderline types of play offers insight into the ways and reasons why we moderate our play, and the expansiveness of what play can be. Good *and* bad.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

2 *EVE Online*: Don't Trust Anyone!

```
** You have entered Corporation Recruitment **
[AxCronstedt]: are any corporations looking for
industrial players? I've got 8 mil skill points
[AxCronstedt]: I want to get access to nullsec mining
[NyanCo]: TEST is always looking for people to help
supply the war effort. I'll private message you
```

EVE Online is a science-fiction-themed massively multiplayer online game (MMOG), first released in 2003. Regular free expansions have kept the game's graphics and gameplay up to date, and *EVE* is one of the few remaining Western subscription-based MMOGs (players pay around fifteen dollars a month).[1] As of 2020, the game maintains a passionate and committed player base of around 300,000 players. While this pales in comparison to many other games in the genre, *EVE* has proved fascinating for academic study for a number of reasons: its emergent "sandbox" style of player-generated gameplay, its unapologetic difficulty and steep learning curve,[2] its uncharacteristically low percentage of female players (estimated to be as low as 3 percent, against the MMOG average of around 40 percent),[3] and the relatively unrestrained

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

interactions between players from around the world. Unlike other MMOGs that put players into separate replications of the virtual world, all *EVE* players play in the same game world, allowing for out-of-game constraints, prejudices, language barriers, and stereotypes to be brought into the game's politics.[4] For our purposes, though, the most fascinating and unusual feature of *EVE* is the absence of formal rules against deception and betrayal, leading to a culture of mistrust that pervades the entire game.

The Virtual Universe of *EVE Online*

```
** You have entered a private chat **
[NyanCo]: hey so why do you want to
[AxCronstedt]: I've been mining for a few years and
I know I can make more money in nullsec, and I also
want to have some new friends to play with since the
guys I started with have dropped out
[NyanCo]: yeh cool we do that all. big part of the
corp is about just hanging out with other pilots.
We'll play non-eve games together and we do some-
thing every night in this time zone. Very chill and
we need more industrial-bros to help the war!!
```

The *EVE* universe is largely divided into two areas of space: *high-sec* and *null-sec*. In high-sec, where players begin, the game's nonplayer character police, called CONCORD, come to your defense if you are attacked unprovoked, meaning that players are mostly left alone to engage in the player-versus-environment (PvE) play of industry, mining, and fighting nonplayer enemies to complete quests.[5] In null-sec, no such protection exists, and this is where groups of players can claim

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

sovereignty over solar systems to build space stations and infrastructure for allies. Despite the greater risks, the rewards from play in this lawless Wild West of the game are much greater, and control over in-game territory is aggressively contested.

The alliances that control this territory are made up of multiple corporations—the *EVE* version of a game guild or clan—that range from a dozen players to thousands, with the largest alliances aligning more than thirty thousand players. The wars between these groups are fierce and awesome in scope, fought continuously by players around the world, with pivotal battles seeing thousands of players online at once. For these players, the opportunity to contribute to these great wars and the game's unfolding narrative is core to the appeal of playing the game. In this context, the strong social relationships that form within these corporations have become integral to the game's ongoing success.

[AxCronstedt]: awesome! So what happens now?

[NyanCo]: the next step is submitting a formal application at www.[Alliance Website].net. you'll need to submit your full api key so that we can check you're not a spai. ill message you when its been approved

[AxCronstedt]: I'll do that right now! Spk soon o7[6]

Such is the scale of organizing these enormous alliances that they have official "HR officers," players who volunteer their time to assess applications and recruit new members. For coordination, a complex IT infrastructure supports forums, chat rooms, and websites dedicated to supporting communications and the broader organization of the alliance, as well as specific websites for processing and managing alliance membership. Enabling these third-party sites, the developer provides "API keys" that players can create to give external

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

programs access to verified information from within the game client, meaning that players can authenticate their identity on alliance forums, and HR officers can assess an applicant's eligibility to join. A "full" API key can give access to all of a player's financial information, crucial for preventing enemy spies from joining a corporation.

[NyanCo]: hey! Your application has been approved. You just need to transfer the 100,000,000 ISK bond and you can fly out to nullsec to join us

[AxCronstedt]: awesome! What is the bond for though?

[NyanCo]: its just in case you start shooting someone in the Alliance so we can pay them back if you destroy their ship, since you don't have a recommendation from an existing member

[AxCronstedt]: ok no worries. o7

[NyanCo]: hopefully you can join us on the fleet tomorrow!!!

What is astonishing about these mammoth organizations—probably best understood as a form of Benedict Anderson's *imagined communities* because, like nation-states, they are so large that players will never know most of their fellow members—is that *EVE* has no formal or informal rules against deception and betrayal. While technical exploits (such as hacking a player's account or the game client) are disallowed, trickery rooted in social deception is explicitly condoned. The "scams and exploits" page on the official *EVE Online* website states:

> As can happen in the real world, someone in EVE may try to cheat you out of your hard-earned possessions. . . . A scam is what happens when someone takes advantage of your misplaced trust, temporary confusion or ignorance of game rules, and robs you via legal

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

in-game means. When this occurs, there is nothing the support team can do for you.[7]

EVE therefore offers an opportunity to explore the second assumption: that treacherous play is antisocial. How is it that *EVE* players have developed these enormous and intimate social groups, when they cannot trust anyone around them? How do widespread deception and betrayal affect the social experience of the game? And why, when the *EVE* sandbox has so much else to offer, would a player choose to steal from others? I explore these questions by looking at the experience of treacherous play for the betrayers, the betrayed, and the bystanders to the act.

Scamming in *EVE Online*

A huge variety of scams exist in *EVE Online*, many of them drawing on the real world for inspiration. Some are quite basic, such as selling intangibles like location bookmarks (where you might find something of greater value) or using simple tricks that exploit the game's user interface. A favorite of one player I spoke with was to advertise a contract for "1 x CHARON SHIP, QUICK SALE, 1.3 BILLION ISK" (a decent price for the powerful ship) but only enter the price as 130 million (a steal). The victims, thinking they are taking advantage of a typing error, quickly accept the contract before anyone else does, which, to their misfortune, only contains one unit of the in-game commodity "Carbon," worth only 300 ISK.[8] Unfortunately for the new owner of this piece of coal, when scams like these occur, "there is nothing the support team can do for you."

More complex scams require the development of social relationships over longer periods of time. Smaller and typically industrial *EVE* corporations have shared accounts and

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

inventories so that players can coordinate their play for in-game advantage. Harald Warmelink describes one such organization—"Major," which focused on resource production and sales—which he studied for his book *Online Gaming and Playful Organization*.[9] Warmelink describes a weeklong application process and a two-hour interview to join the group, which comprised around forty members who pooled their assets and labor to earn as much money as possible from industrial production and market sales, freighting their products around the game world to maximize profit, using Google Docs spreadsheets to coordinate their efforts. Many scammers focus on stealing from these types of corporations, building trust and relationships with leaders over weeks and months to gain as much access as possible before stealing everything they can. These types of scams are intimate and highly personal, involving many hours of playing together, chatting about the game and real life in text and voice chat channels to build trust.

For Ian Brooks, who approaches the ethics of betrayal in *EVE Online* from an Aristotelian point of view, this is key to what makes scamming in *EVE* unethical. It is clearly possible to develop very real friendships in *EVE*.[10] Since successful scams like these are predicated on the victim coming to see the scammer as a (real) friend, to then betray this friendship is an unethical thing to do. According to Brooks, this is because—in an Aristotelian account—friendship is holistic, cannot be bounded into the "player-subject," as Miguel Sicart might argue, and therefore cannot be part of the play of the game.[11] I discuss this point further in chapter 4, in relation to *Survivor*, where a similar argument is made by players at Final Tribal Council.

There are many other, less personal scams in *EVE*. The largest scams occur in the play of *EVE*'s banks, player organizations

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

based on trust that pay dividends on player investments. Typically banks are oriented around raising capital for manufacturing the game's largest and most powerful ships, complex industrial manufacturing with requirements that exceed the financial capabilities of a single player. The potential for a return on their investment involving little effort can be extremely tempting for players, but considerable work has to be done to build trust. Banks often last for years, growing slowly, showing a strong record of investment returns, and involving groups of prominent players who have established themselves in game forums as knowledgeable, competent, and trustworthy. Advertisements for investments often describe the systems for auditing and transparency that are in place to secure investments and to make sure a single player cannot steal from the group.

Invariably, these are all scams, long cons that net hundreds of billions of ISK from players. In 2010 the investment firm Titans 4 U, run by the player "Bad Bobby," raised money to purchase and copy the "blueprints" necessary for building the game's most expensive and powerful ships. Profits from sales were distributed among investors, and the original Titan blueprints kept secure in a "holding corporation" where the combined votes of the company directors were needed for access. Under the guise of adding more directors, Bad Bobby initiated a vote to add more shares, momentarily giving him total control and allowing him to steal assets equivalent to 850 billion ISK. This was the largest scam in *EVE*'s history until 2011's Phaser Inc., an investment bank that offered 5 percent weekly returns. Running the bank for eight months and consistently paying out to players, the "savvy investors" were in fact running a Ponzi scheme. Any returns players tried to withdraw were simply paid out using the investments of new depositors,

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

allowing the bankers to steal one trillion ISK, worth around $38,000 at the time.[12] This all happened despite *EVE*'s number one rule, "DON'T TRUST ANYONE."

Since *EVE Online*'s launch, the game's publisher, CCP Games, has held the position that "the freedom to scam and commit piracy, espionage, and extortion are all fundamental to the EVE Online experience."[13] In 2019 I spoke with Hilmar Veigar Pétursson (the CEO of CCP Games since 2004) about the inclusion of scamming in *EVE*, which he sees as a result of giving players "very flexible systems where all the factors of human nature would emerge into similar behaviors as we see in reality." While scamming was not specifically designed for, "it wasn't a surprise to us when it started to emerge because we had built those facilities for such things to happen."[14]

This flexible approach is key to understanding how and why scamming is a key part of *EVE Online*; it is a game that prides itself on the freedom and flexibility it offers players in how they choose to play and how they might organize their social activities. Hilmar describes *EVE* as a "social experiment of a few hundred thousand people coming together to play this great adventure, just like they were to do if it were happening for real," and the result is a game that offers "all the spectrum of human emotions." To intervene and ban scamming would be "saying that we are different than reality because we, the company, is policing relationships." Scamming is not an isolated part of *EVE* but part of the fabric of what makes the game unique. Nevertheless, the scammers whom I interviewed all knew that their chosen style of play was perceived negatively outside the *EVE* community.

[NyanCo]: oh hey I know most of your assets are parked in JITA at the moment, there is a freighter

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

making the jump to our main station in 6VDT in 15 minutes if you want to get it all moved

[NyanCo]: we waive the fee for newbros

[NyanCo]: way safer than flying it out yourself and you can pay the Alliance for insurance (50m ISK)

[AxCronstedt]: I was just going to sell it in JITA and buy new stuff in 6VDT?

[NyanCo]: nah shit is way more expensive in 6VDT because we don't have enough industrial players like you, its why I recruited u

[NyanCo]: should I tell him you're not interested?

[AxCronstedt]: no no no I'll do it that's awesome thanks you guys are the best, so excited to join the fleet tonight!

[NyanCo]: ok just contract everything to the character Naxiom Telfast and he'll contract it back to you when its at 6VDT

Typically, when I do qualitative research into understanding player experience in games, I draft some contextual questions to get the discussion going. These questions are particularly important when researching something you don't necessarily understand the boundaries of from the outset. One of the early participants' replies to one of these questions perfectly captured what it was that scammers were engaging in.

Carter: How do you normally play? (PvP, industrial, market, etc.)

Participant: PvP, ratting [a type of PvE], industrial and people. I have multiple accounts.

To this player, who habitually infiltrates enemy alliances to weaken them through financial thefts or fostering social

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

instability, treacherous play is a style of play referred to as "people," just like "raiding" in *World of Warcraft*, or "role play" in *Dungeons & Dragons*. Another described themselves as using their "~words~ to make ISK instead of shooting red crosses" (a colloquialism for PvE). What was clear, across a wide range of different types of scammers who engaged in scamming for many different reasons, was that scamming is a form of interpersonal competition: my ability to deceive you versus your ability to detect my deception.

[AxCronstedt]: hey what time is the fleet I still don't have access to the forums

[NyanCo]: its in 45 minutes. Can you be here in time?

[NyanCo]: let me check your account

[AxCronstedt]: thanks!

[NyanCo]: yeah you're all good.

[NyanCo]: do you have anything to fly yet?

[AxCronstedt]: yeh I contracted all my ships to Naxiom

[NyanCo]: I don't think he's online yet tho. send me like 160mil ISK and I will fit out a ship for you so you can join the fleet straight away

[AxCronstedt]: sweet thanks man!!!! So excited!

Unfortunately for AxCronstedt, NyanCo was one of the more successful scammers I interviewed.[15] This transcript is a highly simplified version of a "recruitment scam" that NyanCo ran. The player used a fake recruitment website—the official site had a .com address, the fake one a .net—to lull victims into a sense of false security: a form of deception by bureaucracy. The veneer of authenticity brought on by the rigorous third-party website lulled his many victims into misplacing trust. This scam involved hours of chatting over days or even

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

weeks, convincing scammed players to join the alliance, building their enthusiasm while at the same time scamming them for all their worldly possessions. By collecting the full API key (for the process of "HR recruitment"), NyanCo could confirm what assets were worth stealing.[16]

[AxCronstedt]: HEY WHAT THE FUCK

[NyanCo]: :)

[AxCronstedt]: I tried to dock in 6VDT and it said I wasn't allowed! THEN THE FLEET FUCKING BLEW ME UP

[AxCronstedt]: I RESPAWNED BACK IN JITA

[AxCronstedt]: WHERES ALL MY STUFF SHIT NYANCO

[AxCronstedt]: WHERES ALL MY STUFF

[AxCronstedt]: THAT WAS ALL MY STUFF

[NyanCo]: wiki.eveuniversity.org/Scams_in_EVE_Online

[NyanCo]: thanks for the 4 billion isk! o7

[AxCronstedt]: fuck you

This exchange epitomizes the highly negative reaction many scam victims have. Many players I spoke to discussed instances of thefts where the scammed player "never logged back in," and while few would admit to feeling bad about their unusual style of play, the prevailing theme in every interview was that upsetting others was not their goal. Their primary motivation was to steal high-value items.[17] When players of the alliance I studied provide accounts of their scams on the alliance forums or with other scammers, they don't place emphasis, like a griefer might, on angry reactions but highlight screenshots of their haul, the social deception involved, and social dominance exerted. For the players I spoke with, the goal is deceiving and manipulating their opponent and demonstrating their excellence in *EVE*'s social competition:

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

"The scams I do take a lot of social engineering. When they work out, I feel pretty proud and superior." Trust is within the domain of competition in *EVE*, just as marksmanship is in the domain of competition in *DayZ*.

This notion of treacherous play as a form of social combat was also backed up by player's descriptions of what skills you need to be able to scam in *EVE*. The advice from players was that "you just need to [be able to] keep talking" and maintain a good lie. Others described the way that their deception in *EVE Online* had helped their social skills off-line, teaching them a lot about conversational dynamics and helping build their confidence in the real world.

So who are these players? The scammers in my studies were overwhelmingly IT workers, reflecting the demographics of *EVE*. Some exceptions included a composer, two homemakers, and a serving member of the US Army who played treacherously from his base while deployed. It is beyond the scope of my research to claim that these treacherous players are as ethical in real life as any other player in *EVE Online*, but all described a life outside their play that just seemed, well, normal. They were all just like any other *EVE Online* player, only maybe a little more talkative.

It is straightforward to see how scamming, as a form of competition, would be compelling. No two "marks" in *EVE* are the same. Each needs to be convinced, deceived, and cajoled in subtly different ways. The breadth and variety of the social challenge, and the creativity involved in deriving new schemes—particularly in comparison to the other repetitive styles of play in *EVE*—offered players a continually engaging style of play, with an increasing difficulty level as scammers try to pull off bigger and bigger heists. Considering scamming

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

as a form of competition allows us to explore that first assumption: can scamming be ethical?

Can Scamming Be Ethical?

Most games in the MMOG genre involve only minor consequences for losing during competitive play. Lisbeth Klastrup describes death in *World of Warcraft* as a "risk-free endeavor," like any number of repeatable activities that are part of everyday life in the game.[18] *EVE Online* is different. The stakes are high in competitive play, and there are consequences if you lose. Ships, many worth billions of ISK, that are destroyed in combat are permanently removed from the game, with wreckage that can be looted by the victors. The consequences of *EVE* combat thus mirror the consequences of losing to theft; stealing a ship through deception involves the same "mere violence" to a player's game goals as destroying a ship in combat.

To unpack this subject a little more, we can consider one of Nguyen and Zagal's criteria for the ethical competitive game, which is that it must involve an "alignment of struggle between players," in other words, that competition must be fair.[19] An unethical example under this criterion is the experienced and powerful player who seeks out weaker, lower-skill-level players to kill them at little challenge. Under Nguyen and Zagal's approach, the skill discrepancy means that the aggressor is doing something morally wrong.[20] *EVE* ship combat is interesting in this regard, as it is structurally an unfair competition. Rather than leveling up through repetitive game actions, *EVE* characters gain skill points over time. Trained skills gain access to more powerful ships and abilities, and leveling up skills (five levels, increasing in training time

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

exponentially) gives boosts (such as 5 percent more damage). This means that an account that has been playing *EVE* for five years has an unassailable advantage in game combat, not even taking into consideration the economic advantage the player has to fly more powerful and more expensive ships.

So, in terms of Nguyen and Zagal's ethics of competition, the "struggle" of social combat is more closely aligned between players than it is with ship combat. Any scammer is competing on a level playing field with their opponent, using the same social tools that both players are equipped with.

However, since *EVE* is such a complex game, a level playing field is not always the case. When I asked Hilmar, the CCP Games CEO, about the changing perceptions of scamming over the game's long history, he noted that some scamming has "gotten out of control, and we need to start to rein it in, because there is such a skill and information asymmetry that exists from old players to new players that is terrible, it's like too easy to set up easy traps for new players to fall into." Since these scams don't pose any risk to the scammer, and there is such a "power gap between the scammer and the scammee" in terms of their knowledge of the game, the risk to the scammer is not proportionate to the risk to the player.

This imbalance illuminates an interesting distinction between losing a ship to combat and losing a ship to a scam. To destroy my ship in combat, you would have to risk your ship in the fight. Other than my reputation, which can be refreshed through the use of "alt" accounts, a scammer running quick and easy scams on new players has not proportionally risked. Under this logic, relationship betrayal—which takes time and considerable effort—is okay, but market-based scams that prey on a player's lack of knowledge are not. After all, as Hilmar puts it, *EVE Online* is meant to be "cruel but fair."

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Nguyen and Zagal's second criterion is the requirement for consent, which is not straightforward where competition involves deception. The players I studied would routinely reference the game's pervasive informal rule "DON'T TRUST ANYONE," and official game advertisements extolling the possibilities of scamming and espionage in *EVE*, along with game paratexts like *BBC News* articles about large in-game thefts, clearly establish that thievery is legitimate and to be expected.[21] The *unnecessary obstacles* that construct the challenge of *EVE Online* play *include* the threat of deception. Players continually told me about their most satisfying scams being not necessarily the biggest but ones where they had either established total social control or tricked players who "should know better." The challenge of this form of competition is lost if the opponent trusts blindly.

This is not to gloss over *EVE*'s culture, which is very different from mainstream game culture. It isn't anonymous, but it is extremely aggressive, combative, exclusive, and masculine, featuring the same genres of toxic racist, sexist, and homophobic language and memes that pervade other "hard-core" game scenes. *EVE* is notoriously difficult to learn how to play well, requiring incredibly in-depth knowledge. Eighteen years of hostility toward new and "casual" players have shaped an extremely homogeneous player culture (to reemphasize, some estimates put *EVE* at 97 percent male), perhaps doing more to explain the third assumption about treacherous play. How you choose to play may not say much about you, but the games you choose to play might.

This discussion also helps explain the interesting way *EVE* players act toward "newbros," the colloquial term for new and inexperienced players in the game and another representation of this exclusive masculine culture. Elsewhere I have written

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

with other *EVE* scholars about the ways that some of *EVE*'s powerful alliances use this term to create a culture of acceptance and encouragement for new players and to admonish players who are too harsh or critical of "newbro" mistakes.[22] Scammers would often describe situations where they had chosen not to scam a player who was disadvantaged in some way, going so far as to warn them about potential scams in the future. For example:

> I remember on one occasion there was a newbie. . . . I decided to go through with the scam regardless, not because I had any interest in his valuables but rather I wanted to offer up an important lesson about EVE to a new player. . . . After I cleaned him out . . . I came clean and explained what had occurred. I handed him his money and assets back to him, and even threw in a few faction frigates and quadrupled his total isk value. . . . I then chatted to him about various other scams to be aware of in the world of EVE and set him on his way.

This forgiving approach was by no means universal, though, and a common perspective was that "everyone who plays *EVE* understands how harsh of a world it is. If they don't, they need to learn." Players who quit *EVE* after being scammed (a not entirely uncommon response) are part of a process of homogenizing *EVE*'s player base. *EVE* is hard and unforgiving, and only players who enjoy this style of play remain. This is something that the rhetoric scholar Chris Paul has noted about *EVE Online* and the way "elements of EVE's design push players away from the game. . . . Early moments of the game effectively tell new people that they do not belong, that this is not a game they should be playing."[23] Kelly Boudreau similarly points out how transgressive play in online games more broadly is a form of boundary keeping, because it works to maintain a particular form of toxic subculture.[24]

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

To play treacherously is to play in a way that—consciously or not—hones the community of players into one constructed to accept and expect treacherous play, and the hypercompetitive, "cruel but fair" masculine "bro" player culture that exists alongside it. As a result, anyone left playing has consented to this form of competition.

You might be puzzled why people still fall for these scams in *EVE*. After all, the "number one" rule of *EVE Online* is "DON'T TRUST ANYONE." When you read the exchanges between AxCronstedt and NyanCo, I'm confident that at some stage you grew a little frustrated with AxCronstedt's obliviousness, his willingness to trust in a game advertised with the slogan "BE THE VILLAIN." While scamming is pervasive, the majority of *EVE* players are not scammers. Volunteers run in-game help channels and assist in organizations like EVE University that are dedicated to introducing new players to the game. Players in corporations build up meaningful relationships during their play and make meaningful sacrifices for their allies. In fact, I estimate that fewer than 1 percent of *EVE* players pursue this way of playing the game. Trusting is part of playing *EVE*, and trusting is just not without its risks. In chapter 6, I further explore how this trust is necessary for treacherous play.

So I have now established the suggestion that scamming in *EVE* is a form of social, player-versus-player combat. This is backed up by player descriptions of the practice as a form of "playing people," the appeal of a scam, and the skills a scammer needs. Scamming is a great example of treacherous play, as deception and betrayal are being used in a direct way for a clear purpose: financial gain. Yet another form of betrayal exists in the *EVE* game world, with a much more pronounced impact on the game world's history, and much more complex effects and implications.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Espionage in *EVE Online*

Reflecting again how *EVE* is designed to closely model reality, in the wars waged between *EVE*'s powerful null-sec alliances, espionage plays a crucial role. In comparison to the direct, clinical ruthlessness of scamming, the deception and betrayals of espionage may go on for months and even years. While a scam might negatively affect a single player, key acts of betrayal in *EVE*'s "spy metagame" directly impact tens of thousands of players, as well as the very history of the game world.

The Fountain War was a conflict in 2013 between two of the game's largest alliances—TEST Alliance Please Ignore (TEST) and the Goonswarm Federation (GSF). After a period of tense relations, the nineteenth expansion to *EVE Online: Odyssey* made minor changes to the way that minerals could be found in null-sec, leading to GSF and its coalition invading TEST's home region of Fountain.

The Fountain War was won not principally by military victories but by espionage and betrayal. TEST's ally, N3, had a powerful "Australian bloc" who were consistently able to unwind the military efforts of GSF's superior North American pilots, resulting in a fiercely fought stalemate.[25] Yet GSF was able to gain a "beachhead" in Fountain to stage its war owing to an act of betrayal, as a discredited and unpopular former leader of TEST coordinated with GSF to "drop" control of five solar systems. GSF was able to quickly take control of the systems, gaining a useful advantage in the war, before TEST leaders realized what had happened.

Over the next two weeks, TEST and its allies slowly took back four of the five solar systems. Only 4-EP12 remained, and if lost, it could mean "closing the door on their invasion completely."[26] Attacking in Australian prime time (AUTZ) when

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

the GSF was at its weakest, 750 pilots arrived in the system, and the GSF fleet quickly withdrew. Yet despite this show of strength, 4-EP12 remained invulnerable to TEST's attack. A spy within TEST with trusted access had disabled TEST's claim for sovereignty over the solar system, so that TEST could not expel GSF from the system that night. Although a minor act of sabotage in the long war, this incident proves the effectiveness of sabotage against military superiority in *EVE Online*.

Betrayal characterized the remainder of the war. Goonswarm diplomats persuaded a senior player in N3 to steal 350 billion ISK and forfeit *all* of the alliance's territory, forcing N3 players to return to their home systems to reclaim lost territory. Later, a TEST logistics director—after feeling insulted by another director—stole 130 billion ISK worth of logistical supplies from TEST, further hindering the war efforts. These public acts of betrayal were broadcast like propaganda to further demoralize the coalition that was quickly losing territory in Fountain.[27] Treacherous play had turned the tide.

As in any war, logistics are crucially important in *EVE*, and players who volunteered to assist in this way were under enormous pressure. Exacerbating the situation, GSF's espionage team was able to get access to a shared Google Docs spreadsheet that recorded the locations of TEST logistics structures in space (such as the location of a mine on a moon in a solar system). Rather than deleting the document to temporarily disrupt TEST, GSF simply introduced small errors to this document to add to the pressure and stress of logistics players, who would then arrive in the wrong system or at the wrong moon. The effect was to increase social tension, burning out the volunteers and tempting more to defect.

Alongside these instances of human intelligence (many *EVE* spies I interviewed would use terms borrowed from the

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

real espionage community), signals intelligence played a crucial role in fighting the war and detecting spies. One interview participant, who has led the espionage efforts of a major *EVE* alliance, developed software that automated scraping API keys of other players to give them access to player communications.

> I had bots that scraped eve-mails, notifications, even out-of-game resources like pastebin for communications, api keys, etc, and filtered it all out to a handful of jabbers channel for me.

This player also used programs that automatically scraped enemy forums for keywords and another that pretended to be a player looking for in-game services to harvest IP addresses. The effectiveness of these technologically advanced examples of signals intelligence is that, by posting the data to a jabber (text chat client) channel, players were able to intercept enemy intelligence in real time. This gave their alliance considerable in-game advantage, such as knowing when enemy fleets might attack, where they currently were, who was leading the fleet, and even what specific ships the enemy fleet was targeting: information that could be relayed to the defense ships to begin healing a target before it had even taken damage.

In tandem with these efforts to automate spying, intelligence directors also used their technical expertise to uncover spying. One tactic is to identify the IP addresses of players using alliance-controlled forums and IT and then cross-reference this information with the known IP addresses of hostile players. This tactic is regarded as commonplace, and any spy uncovered using this method is considered careless. A more complex method is watermarking. With screenshot watermarking, for instance, forums are given unique watermarks, so that if private information is leaked via screenshot, it is possible to determine the identity of the person who took the screenshot (figures 2.1 and 2.2).

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

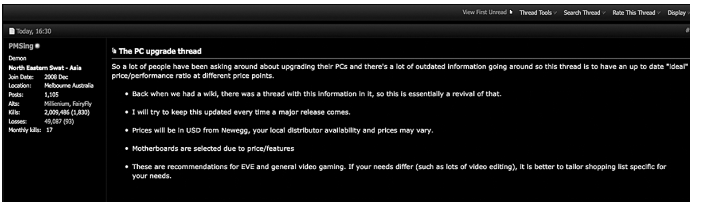
View First Unread
Thread Tools
Search Thread
Rate This Thread
Display
Today, 16:30
PMSing
Demon
North Eastern Swat - Asia
Join Date: 2008 Dec
Location: Melbourne Australia
Posts: 1,105
Alts: Millenium, FiiryFly
Kills: 2,009,486 (1,830)
Losses: 49,087 (93)
Monthly Kills: 17
The PC upgrade thread
So a lot of people have been asking around about upgrading their PCs and there's a lot of outdated information going around so this thread is to have an up to date "ideal" price/performance ratio at different price points.
Back when we had a wiki, there was a thread with this information in it, so this is essentially a revival of that.
I will try to keep this updated every time a major release comes.
Prices will be in USD from Newegg, your local distributor availability and prices may vary.
Motherboards are selected due to price/features
These are recommendations for EVE and general video gaming. If your needs differ (such as lots of video editing), it is better to tailor shopping list specific for your needs.

Figure 2.1
A screenshot from the private forum of a powerful *EVE Online* alliance (provided by Rami114).

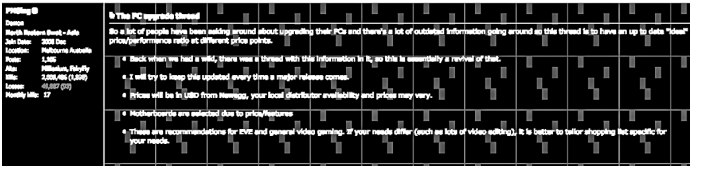
PMSing
Demon
North Eastern Swat - Asia
Join Date: 2008 Dec
Location: Melbourne Australia
Posts: 1,105
Alts: Millenium, FiiryFly
Kills: 2,009,486 (1,830)
Losses: 49,087 (93)
Monthly Kills: 17
The PC upgrade thread
So a lot of people have been asking around about upgrading their PCs and there's a lot of outdated information going around so this thread is to have an up to date "ideal" price/performance ratio at different price points.
Back when we had a wiki, there was a thread with this information in it, so this is essentially a revival of that.
I will try to keep this updated every time a major release comes.
Prices will be in USD from Newegg, your local distributor availability and prices may vary.
Motherboards are selected due to price/features
These are recommendations for EVE and general video gaming. If your needs differ (such as lots of video editing), it is better to tailor shopping list specific for your needs.

Figure 2.2
The same screenshot with the digital watermark revealed. The pattern is unique to the user logged in.

All these examples indicate the vital importance of treacherous play in *EVE*'s wars. GSF's use of a variety of forms of social competitive play eventually won the war. Misplaced trust was used to win—or avoid—key battles, and spies gave GSF access to information that was used to build relationships with potential defectors and sabotage opponents to cause frustrating losses. Writing in *Internet Spaceships Are Serious Business*, "Endie," the head of GSF espionage during the Fountain War, discussed another strategy of framing "innocent leading individuals within a hostile alliance" to cause "finger-pointing and suspicion between entirely loyal members."[28] As alliances are built on trust and relationships, it is inevitable in *EVE* that they would become a domain of competition in this way. According to Hilmar, these types of play are acceptable so long as they fall "within the four walls of the game."

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Like scamming, espionage is a highly competitive style of social combat that requires intimate knowledge of game mechanics and the politics of enemy alliances. Playing *EVE* requires a commitment that exceeds that of many other games, and espionage players need to be two or even three *EVE* players at once. The appeal for these players lies in this challenge, in these unnecessary obstacles, and in the creativity they must bring to stay one step ahead of their opponents. Espionage is social player versus player at the grandest scale, and *EVE*'s wars provide a powerful narrative context that these betrayals contribute to, in turn imbuing treacherous play with the meaning of forging the history of the entire game world.

The Appeal of Being Betrayed

Playing *EVE Online* is a voluntary activity, so it must be appealing to its players. One of the reasons why treachery is extremely rare in games is that it typically incites stronger negative emotions than other types of consequential failure in online games. There are far more cases of players quitting the game because they were scammed than players quitting because they lost the equivalent value in combat. Why? Jesper Juul notes that failure in games is something of a paradox.[29] We generally try to avoid failure, but we seek it out in games, and games that are too easy are often not very appealing. To understand the difference between good and bad failure, one theory Juul draws on is Lyn Abramson's *attribution theory*.[30]

Attribution theory suggests that, for every event, we search for a cause, particularly when we fail. So with something like being scammed, our immediate response is to consider whether to blame the game, ourselves, the scammer, or some other thing. Abramson suggests three dimensions to the ways we deal with failure: internal versus external, stable versus

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

unstable, and global versus specific. When failure is internal, stable, and global, players may experience *learned helplessness* where their confidence in their own competence is reduced. Conversely if players can attribute their failure to an external factor (the game is badly designed) or believe that it is unstable (they will improve), the negative experience of failure can be reduced.

This understanding offers us some insight into why treacherous play can lead to such strong negative emotions. To "fail" at treacherous play—for example, losing a ship to theft like AxCronstedt—is to misplace your trust: an internal, possibly stable and global inadequacy. In comparison, to "fail" at combat—losing the same ship in battle—suggests that you are inadequate at fighting with virtual internet spaceships, an internal but unstable and highly specific inadequacy. While each case has the same level of consequence (in both, the ship is irreversibly lost), when we understand treachery as a form of social combat, we see how being betrayed reflects an internal failure that is relevant to everyday life, a possible explanation for the strong negative emotions.

Here we also see another way that betraying (or detecting a spy) might contribute to *EVE Online*'s appeal. Detecting a scam reflects social competence, an internal adequacy relevant to everyday life. For the betrayer, scamming someone does the same. This was a core part of the appeal of *EVE Online* scamming for one of my research participants, who strongly felt that scamming had improved their confidence outside the game.

While these theories, and the notion of betrayal aversion introduced in chapter 1, provide some insight into why treachery is so often met with strong negative reactions, it is worth considering how being betrayed can be a source enjoyment for players. When I explain this area of research, I am frequently asked, "What is fun about a game where you can't

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

trust anyone?" I typically ask in response, "Well, what is fun about losing at chess? Or about being killed in *Call of Duty*?" The appeal lies not in the bounded experience of loss or failure but in the adoption of the unnecessary obstacles that constitute a lusory goal. Risk, after all, is exciting, and the presence of treacherous play ensures that social interactions are riskier, more intense, and more engaging. It is *because* of treachery that *EVE*'s social experience is so strong. Hilmar pointed out to me that "if betraying trust does not have severe consequences, then giving trust doesn't really mean anything." Just as the risk of losing a ship makes combat more intense and ensures that players put more effort into their play, so too does the risk of misplacing trust. Aided by the homogeneous demographics of the game, the culture of mistrust leads to players forming closer and more meaningful social relationships as a strategy to prevent betrayal. Leaders in *EVE* alliances meet up to form relationships "in person" to build trust, and thousands travel each year to the developer's headquarters in Reykjavik, Iceland, for the annual *EVE* Fanfest event. Treachery is not prosocial, but it contributes to the appeal of *EVE* by demanding a more intimate and meaningful social experience than can be found in the increasingly casualized MMOG market.

In examining what makes the difference between "good" negative and "bad" negative experiences, Kristine Jørgensen notes that positive discomfort is connected to game content that has a purpose within the narrative,[31] and betrayal is by no means out of place in *EVE*, where it reflects CCP Games' desire to develop a game that offers players "all the spectrum of human emotions."[32] We can also see this in the way many *EVE* players explain the game by simply saying, "*EVE* is *real*."[33] This colloquialism (which later featured centrally in an official *EVE* trailer) refers to the way in which *EVE*, particularly in

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

comparison to other games, is considered more real by players; the history of the game world and the stories of its empires, the intensely felt emotions of play, and the work and effort involved are *real*. Due to treacherous play, its social experiences and its wars are more real too.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

3 *DayZ*: Treachery in the Zombie Apocalypse

> we had some awesome stuff, 2 pistols, heaps of meds, then we saw a dude with no weapons.
>
> He asked if we could give him a blood transplant so we figured we would, then as we were picking up the blood bag he went into our pack, took our stored pistol and shot us. . . .
>
> MOTHER F*****R!!!!
>
> —Andrew, *DayZ* player

Death in most games is a minor inconvenience, a metaphor for failure. When you die in *Halo*, you simply respawn a few seconds later, maybe a few moments back in time. This is not the case in *DayZ*, a zombie-themed survival game where you begin on the coast of a vast virtual world with only a few rudimentary items, needing to scavenge food, water, and weapons to survive for more than a short period. When your character is killed in *DayZ*, you do not respawn. Instead you must start again, losing all your advancement, potentially from hours of play. The entire experience of playing *DayZ* is transformed by the harsh and brutal experience of dying, raising the stakes of every choice and interaction the player makes.[1]

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

DayZ was first released in early 2012 as a free modification (or "mod") to the 2009 military simulator first-person shooter (FPS) game *ARMA II*. By late 2012, *DayZ* had garnered 1.3 million unique players, outstripping the sales of many blockbuster game titles, and was referred to in *PC Gamer* as one of the "most important things to happen in gaming in 2012."[2] Although its popularity has waned, *DayZ* has been an incredibly influential game.[3] Its scavenging-based survival mechanics have popularized the "survival game" genre, and the compelling and emotionally draining experience of high-consequence death in *DayZ* has repopularized "permadeath" as a game mechanic. The confluence of mechanics incorporated into *DayZ* was also crucial in initiating the recent genre of battle royale games like *Fortnite*. PlayerUnknown—the titular developer of *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* (2017)—first released his enormously successful battle royale game as a modification to *DayZ* in 2013.

For our purposes, though, the most interesting feature of *DayZ* is its proximity-based voice chat. Instead of having formally designated teams, players can communicate with one another using voice so long as their avatars are located nearby, a rare feature in FPS games, which typically do not enable chat between opponents for fear of harassment and toxicity. In *DayZ*, proximity chat creates opportunities for ad hoc collaborations to overcome the obstacles of the harsh virtual world, trade key supplies, and engage in rich and rewarding social experiences. Surviving on your own in *DayZ* is hard, and working together can be the best way to find loot, avoid zombies, and scare off other players looking for an easy kill.

This simple mechanic also introduces the opportunities and motivations for treachery. Why not work together with other players until they find something worth having, and

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

then bury an ax in their head? Who needs to be any good at shooting a shotgun if you can just trick a gunslinger into turning around? Or, in such a treacherous apocalypse where the stakes are so high, why would you risk your life to share a bandage with a player bleeding to death? The potential for treachery lies at the heart of *DayZ*'s social gameplay, and in this chapter, I explore what *DayZ* can tell us about the appeal and ethics of treacherous play.

Motivations for Playing Treacherously

One of the claims I make in this book is that treacherous play is a distinct phenomenon from griefing and trolling, although elements of it are clearly adjacent. Griefing has a range of definitions (often depending on the scholarly background of the researcher), but it is most often framed as antisocial behavior, with the griefer seen as a problem user playing the "wrong" way (to be designed out), or as a cyberbully (motivated by causing displeasure).[4] Without minimizing the negative impact that grief play has on player communities,[5] Jaakko Stenros argues that the griefer is rejecting the social contract that enables shared play, instead playing "by different rules without informing others present in the situation."[6] It's not that griefing isn't play but that it is a form of play that plays with, and against, a game's informal rules. Typically (as an act unrelated to the winning conditions of the game) the griefer's intent is to ruin the experience of others.

Clearly, treacherous play falls within the rules of *DayZ*. It is endorsed by the game's creator and contributes to the authentic survival experience that he was attempting to create, similar to how treachery in *EVE* is coherent with the game's ruthless narrative. It's also something I've continuously found

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

to be accepted within *DayZ*'s informal rules and player communities. One of the reasons is that players have no clear way to win *DayZ*, since the sandbox survival game does not have clearly structured goals or points. As a result, "winning" becomes playing in ways that provide interesting or powerful experiences, which treachery offers in spades. I'll explore this subject a little more later in the chapter when discussing player attitudes toward dying in *DayZ*.

The crux, then, is the player's motivations. What motivates someone to betray? Ruining someone else's day? Or something else?

When the stand-alone version of *DayZ* was released, I and my colleagues deployed a player motivation survey to better understand the appeal of this game that had taken the gaming world by storm. Nick Yee describes the goal of this type of research as being to articulate empirical models that describe the underlying motivations players have for playing online games, providing a meaningful way to differentiate players and understand game preferences and behaviors.[7] Our survey implemented a modified form of Yee's research, where he established an empirical model for motivations of play in games using factor analysis, finding three main components of player motivation, with ten subcomponents.[8] Essentially what Yee's work shows is that players' motivations to engage in different elements of a game are related. For instance, players who enjoy chatting with other players are also more likely to enjoy helping other players (a social player type), while those who are interested in the mechanics of the game are also more likely to be competitive with others (the achievement player type).

Yee found that this player motivation typology was present across players of a number of different games in the massively

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) genre, and his quantitatively sourced, generally applicable model for the different types of player motivations has been highly influential in games research. However, games in the MMORPG genre are largely homogeneous, drawing on the same design tropes and creating similar play experiences. Yee's survey is tailored toward these types of games, often referencing fantasy-MMOG-specific play that is not applicable to games in other genres, like *DayZ* (such as guild membership, persistent friendships, theory crafting), or not encompassing play unusual in MMORPGs, such as kidnapping or permadeath.

Our survey therefore combined questions from Yee's model with questions based on the types of *DayZ* play that are not common in MMORPGs, including betrayal. The resulting inventory of forty-one questions included thirty questions that asked about the player's enjoyment of game elements and situations (e.g., "When you play *DayZ*, do you enjoy stealing items from other players?"), and eleven questions that asked about the player's behavior (e.g., "When you play *DayZ*, how often do you make up backstories and personalities for your characters?"). The goal of this research was to test the applicability of these quantitative player motivation models to an emerging genre, along with examining how novel forms of play fit into this existing typology. Although it wasn't the goal when we designed the survey, since we included questions about treacherous play, this kind of research can help us understand what motivates the treacherous player.

Among the 1,704 players who completed our survey,[9] we found nine subcomponents of player motivations, of which six mapped closely to Yee's player types (Competition, Teamwork, Socializing, Discovery, Advancement, and Role Playing).[10] Three novel components reflected the characteristically

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

different experience of *DayZ*. The first was *Treachery*, such as using proximity chat to trick others. The second was *Domineering*, or gaining advantage over players by any means, with no prejudice against violating informal rules like killing new players or logging out of the game to save one's character. Domineering players resembled the player type often referred to as griefers, but treacherous ones did not. The third novel component was *Kidnapping*, which I discuss later in the chapter.

The next step in player motivations research is then to examine the correlation *between* these different subcomponents, finding three main *DayZ* player types. Unlike Yee's components, ours were not as distinct. We can summarize the three player types revealed by the rich text responses as follows:

1. **Social**: Enjoys socializing, teamwork and role play, and kidnapping as an alternative to murder or for an immersive moral role-play experience. Does not kidnap to advance, torture/betray, or dominate.
2. **Treacherous**: Plays competitively, is treacherous so as to advance in game (but is not domineering, does not engage in torture). Enjoys the challenge of killing other players who possess better items.
3. **Goal Oriented**: Motivated by immersion or advancement, with a strong competition component. Collaborates with friends but not with strangers.

Types 1 and 2 were negatively correlated, most notably around the subcomponent of competition. This finding suggests that whereas the social player interacts with others for the social experience, the treacherous player engages in social interactions as part of the competitive challenge to survive in the game. That is, the motivation for treachery is competition, not

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

causing displeasure or ruining the experience of other players. Qualitative responses reflected how this type of player used proximity chat to kill others, particularly when "they've got good gear and I've got nothing." Your skills with a shotgun versus my skills at deception: a social contest.

In contrast to the conceptualization of a griefer as a cyberbully, the treacherous player is playing within the game's shared intentionality to depict a ruthless zombie apocalypse, rather than rejecting it with the intention of causing displeasure. Like the *EVE Online* scammer, the treacherous player's motivation lies in the value of the objects stolen, not in a player's negative outburst. However, Jaakko Stenros notes another way of conceptualizing the griefer that may have more in common with some treacherous players: as an "entitled asshole."[11] Drawing on Aaron James's book *Assholes: A Theory*, Stenros suggests that another way of understanding griefers is as players who take special liberties in games, believing that they are entitled to special treatment, for whatever reason. In some acts of treachery, the griefer is treating other players as mere objects to be played with rather than equal opponents, reflecting the primacy the treacherous player places on competition and role play over social experience.

Our study also found that both the treacherous player type and the social player type were correlated with kidnapping play. Although not overtly supported in the original game design, kidnapping was an emergent social interaction that emerged from the combination of the proximity voice system to issue verbal demands to other players encountered in the virtual world, and the teamless and goalless structure of *DayZ*. At the time of the survey, items that facilitated kidnapping-style play (such as burlap sacks and handcuffs) were present, as was the ability to force-feed another player food (or poison)

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

and extract blood from a restrained player (which could be used to restore the health of another player with a blood transfusion). Quitting the game was not a solution, since logging out when handcuffed kills the player's character. The combination of permanent death and unpowered spawn (a *DayZ* character begins with no weapons) provides a high-stakes power imbalance that enables kidnapping play.

Questions about kidnapping featured in the survey because I was interested in this unusual way of playing that had gained traction in online communities around *DayZ*. While the items supported it, a few viral videos and stories encouraged it. Several of the respondents to the survey had themselves been kidnapped, rating it their "favorite interaction" even though in most cases it resulted in their death.

Both social players and treacherous players were positively correlated with kidnapping. That is, someone who enjoys the social aspects of *DayZ* also enjoyed kidnapping other players. The social players expressed this attitude in their qualitative

Figure 3.1
DayZ promotional screenshot highlighting kidnapping play.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

comments, as though kidnapping offered a social alternative to killing another player. Rather than a player shooting someone who might be a threat, kidnapping offered a way of playing with this stranger that did not put your highly valued weapons and gear at risk. A common theme was that kidnapping was a form of role play within the game world, allowing players to experiment with the morality of their play. For treacherous players, who don't have a close correlation with the socializing subcomponent, the goals were not to cause displeasure or provoke a reaction but to steal other players' items without killing them (a competitive drive), and to satisfy their desire for role play. Betraying, kidnapping, and otherwise being "bad" in *DayZ* are forms of ethical role play, exploring what is right and wrong in the zombie apocalypse, using other players' bad luck to experience what that is like.

But why not just kill them?

Dying in *DayZ*

> It's truly frightening, like not game-frightening, but oh my god I'm gonna die-frightening. Your hands starts shaking, your hands gets sweaty, your heart pounds, your mind is racing and you're a wreck when it's all over.
>
> —*DayZ* player

If treacherous players were simply motivated by ruining the experience of others, killing would be the way to do it. Very few games feature permadeath as significantly and totally as *DayZ*. One of the players I interviewed described quitting the game for a few days after each time they died, and another broke a wireless mouse in frustration by throwing it in the air when confronted with an abrupt "You Are Dead" message.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Online, players often report getting notifications from their smart watches, alerting them to an unusually high heart rate despite minimal physical activity. A sign of heart disease? Or someone playing *DayZ*?

Death in *DayZ* helps us understand how the negative experience of betrayal can be an attractive and positive part of the game, because, despite these visceral reactions, an overwhelming majority of players view permadeath as a core positive feature. Fifty-one percent of the responses to our survey rated the consequential nature of death "very enjoyable," and it was one of the most positively rated features of *DayZ*'s design. Providing a lesson in survey design, even players who rated their enjoyment of the character death feature as "not enjoyable at all" still often described it positively in the qualitative responses. Players referred to the *fear* of death as what makes the game exciting, citing the adrenaline they get when encountering other players as the profoundly different and unique experience that *DayZ* gives them.

But why do players enjoy the intense negative emotions present in *DayZ*? We find one possible answer in the way players describe seeking out danger in *DayZ* to avoid boredom. To some extent, this is reminiscent of the theory of flow, which holds that people seek out and enjoy tasks that are difficult enough to challenge their abilities, rather than easier tasks that provide little likelihood of failure.[12] However, whereas flow primarily concerns a level of challenge, the more salient feature of permadeath in *DayZ* is a level of risk. This risk creates real fear, as described by a number of players:

> The death being so real, as far as it can be in virtual reality, makes the game seem more real, makes the fear real and the adrenaline real.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Michael Apter's reversal theory is of some use here.[13] In the context of play, Apter identifies two different metamotivational states, ways of being in the world: *telic* and *paratelic*. While the telic mind-set is about being goal driven, the paratelic mind-set is about experience. For a player in a telic mind-set, the increased risk and anxiety of permadeath in *DayZ* are unpleasant because the long-term ambition is under threat. In contrast, increased risk satisfies the paratelic player's desire for high arousal, irrespective of whether it is positively or negatively valenced. This phenomenological approach to understanding play helps us see how negative emotions like anger, horror, and fear can be enjoyed, and why betrayal might, paradoxically, be something we seek out in play.

Of course, we have always been attracted to media that are designed to elicit negative emotions such as fear and sorrow. Games are nothing new here; two and a half centuries ago, David Hume posed the paradox "It seems an unaccountable pleasure, which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions, that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy."[14] Noting that many experiences may be pleasant up to the point that they become painful, Hume posits that both positive and negative feelings are fueled by the same underlying level of passion and excitement, and thus a positive experience "acquires force from sentiments of uneasiness."[15]

What Hume describes is a rough encapsulation of the excitation transfer effect, first detailed in psychology by Dolf Zillmann.[16] This effect concerns two dimensions of how we subjectively experience a stimulus: *arousal* and *valence*. Arousal describes our level of physiological excitement, which may be increased by various kinds of stimuli. Valence describes whether we are attracted (positive valence) or repelled (negative

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

valence) by a stimulus. In excitation transfer, our arousal is increased by a stimulus with a negative valence but becomes associated with a stimulus with a positive valence, resulting in an overall positive experience that borrows the intensity of a negative stimulus (or vice versa). On a roller coaster, for example, we draw our thrills from our intuitive perception of danger but experience the thrill as positive owing to our awareness that we are in fact safe.

This is consistent with the finding that players described dying in *DayZ* as not only compatible with their enjoyment but a direct cause of it. As Brendan Keogh notes, "the true effect of perma-death is not simply in the character's death, but in how it drastically alters the player's lived experience of the character's life."[17] Players report playing more seriously, more intensely, and having a more immersive, "realistic" experience, as if they were in an "actual zombie apocalypse" (figure 3.2). While losing progress is genuinely frustrating, the anticipation of that negative experience meant that *DayZ* evoked unusually intense physiological arousal for a digital

LOOKS LIKE A BARRACKS OR SOMETHING UP AHEAD, FUCKER IS SWARMING WITH ZOMBIES. SHOULD WE TRY AND TAKE IT?
DUDE, YOLO.
YEAH YOU'RE RIGHT.
WE SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL.
WWW.VIRTUALSHACKLES.COM
© 2012 MIKE FAHMIE AND JEREMY VINAR

Figure 3.2
DayZ comic, "YOLO," by Virtual Shackles.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

game, which lent an equivalent intensity to positive experiences of escape, survival, and cooperation.

We can therefore compare the appeal of dying in *DayZ* to survival horror games, a genre typified by player experiences of anticipation and dread. In a list of frightening games, the game review website IGN praises the horror adventure game *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* as "a gauntlet of tension, panic and anxiety" and commends *Silent Hill 2* for presenting "real terror and its consequences."[18] These descriptions could equally be applied to *DayZ*, and their appeal is equally founded in their ability to elicit uncommonly strong negative emotions in the reassuringly safe context of a video game. So long as players perceive an action to be unreal, they are able to transfer its heightened stimulation into heightened enjoyment.[19]

Killing in *DayZ*

We also recognize that others experience a fear of death too; players show strong evidence of moral anguish and guilt when killing another player in *DayZ*. Understanding offers insight into how being bad in a game can still be part of the appeal of play. In a chapter in Kristine Jørgensen and Faltin Karlsen's *Transgression in Games and Play*, Fraser Allison and I analyzed two hundred responses to the survey question "Do you ever feel bad when killing another player in *DayZ*?"[20] More than 90 percent of respondents said that they had, with 17 percent saying they *always* felt bad to some degree. This number is unusually high; previous research into moral concern in first-person shooter games had gone so far as to conclude that "moral management does not apply to multiplayer combat games."[21]

What was clear from players' text responses to the question was that they engage in *moral disengagement*, a process

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

theorized by Albert Bandura to describe how we negotiate the morality of our actions, based on studies of Nazi war criminals. Bandura characterizes morality as a process of self-regulation, in which we compare our actions to learned moral standards, subsequently avoiding actions that might induce guilt. When we engage in something that we perceive to be immoral, we disengage our moral self-regulation by reevaluating our actions in a way that defuses the potential for self-censure.[22] In this way, moral disengagement can be thought of as evidence of a person having experienced guilt. In our study, we found evidence of every type of moral disengagement strategy.[23]

DayZ's lack of formally designated teams burdens players with the choice of whom to kill and not to kill, thus introducing moral responsibility to gameplay. As Miguel Sicart argues, playing a game is an act of moral interpretation, and the way that *DayZ* gives players the responsibility to choose what is right or wrong forces players to engage with the morality of their gameplay. What is interesting about this, though—particularly in our exploration of treacherous play—is that the experience of this moral interpretation is not entirely bound up in the "player-subject," the subidentity that helps resolve the contradictions between our in-game values and our values when playing the game. Killing in *DayZ*—when combined with the harsh permanent consequences of in-game death—affords a player experience of guilt, with comments like "I get a sick feeling in my stomach when I kill someone" being extremely common. The primary type of killing that causes guilt is the killing of new, unarmed, or "innocent" players, but not exclusively. Players described feeling guilty even when they killed a well-armed player, alongside the rush of succeeding in a high-stakes competition, reminiscent of Richard Connell's 1924 short story "The Most Dangerous Game."

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Guilt over killing, then, like the fear of death and displeasure of dying, is part of the (im)moral appeal of *DayZ*. The process of moral interpretation that happens when we play a game does not absolve us or protect us from feeling bad about our actions but provides an opportunity to experience these negative emotions in a safe way. After all, this is a game that shows how negative experiences can be attractive to players. When first released, *DayZ* was celebrated for "giving PC gamers an experience they weren't getting elsewhere, but which they were clearly hanging out for"[24]—an intense, high-stakes, and brutal experience, peppered with moral anguish and guilt over betraying and killing, and frustration and anger over death.[25] The way these two design patterns complement each other assembles the unique experience of playing *DayZ*.

This is not to say that killing is unethical; it is clearly ethical to kill another person in *DayZ*. In chapter 1, I introduced C. Thi Nguyen and José Zagal's conceptualization of the ethics of multiplayer gameplay, which draws on Bernard Suits's principle of the lusory goal—the in-game goal we establish *that is contingent on* a series of unnecessary obstacles.[26] Apter's reversal theory helps us understand how this in-game goal can be paratelic—about the struggle of the competition itself, and the experience of fearing death and moral anguish. To deny you this *lusory struggle* is to deny you the ability to play *DayZ* at all. In the same vein, and as Nguyen and Zagal put it, the better I align my violence with your desire for struggle, the more ethically I am playing. *DayZ* highlights how this violence can go beyond the "mere violence" of, say, taking a chess piece to something more significant, even if it causes me to break my wireless mouse or quit the game entirely.

The experience of death and killing in *DayZ* is why I think it is unproductive to lump treacherous play in with griefing,

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

simply because it causes displeasure. Play does not always have to be light and positive; it can be brutal and harsh too. In virtual worlds like *DayZ* and *EVE Online*, competitive play is predicated on power imbalances and exploiting the mistakes of others. Is the treacherous player, who exploits misplaced trust, any more entitled than the player who stealthily creeps up on opponents, exploiting their misplaced sense of safety? *DayZ* is an amazing example of a game that offers us access to a broader range of human emotions, and the lack of explicit winning conditions provides a sandbox that encourages players to explore these darker aspects of the human experience. Just as with dying and killing, betraying and being betrayed are a part of what makes *DayZ*'s depiction of the zombie apocalypse attractive to players.

Meaningful Death

Of course, bad deaths do happen in *DayZ*. These are deaths that do not contribute to the appeal of the game, and understanding the difference between "good" deaths and "bad" deaths is also useful for exploring the ethics of treacherous play. Or, as I put it in the introduction, the question of whether there is anything less ethical about using my skills at deception than using my skills with a shotgun.

What is clear in *DayZ* is that permadeath is appealing when it is a form of what Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman call "meaningful play," a concept that explains why the relationship between action and outcome needs to be clear to the player.[27] If a player's actions have no discernible relationship with the outcome of the game, then play is meaningless. An example Salen and Zimmerman provide is how moves at the outset of a chess game influence the way the entire game

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

unfolds. If the opening moves in chess were irrelevant to the outcome of the game, then we would put no effort or care into those moves, and they would not be part of the enjoyable intellectual contest of chess.

While these examples each fit highly formalized games with clear win states or levels—which is not the case for the sandbox *DayZ*—when we understand permadeath in *DayZ* as being integrated with the broader context of play, we can begin to differentiate between "good," meaningful deaths and "bad," meaningless ones.

Overwhelmingly, the main kinds of "bad deaths" were those in which players were either killed in one shot by a distant player with a sniper rifle, or killed because of game crashes or bugs, or (to a lesser extent) "killed on sight" by other players who had no intention of interacting socially (KOS players). These deaths were variously referred to as "pointless," "stupid," "unfair," and "meaningless." "Kill on sight" and sniping both featured heavily in responses to the question "What do you like least about the *DayZ* stand-alone?" and were cited more than two hundred times. Ultimately what both of these types of behaviors do is erode players' sense of agency: their ability to discern what will happen if they run across a field or approach a player. The interactions with the system (being shot) have discernible outcomes (dying), but it is the lack of agency that players have with *other* players that can make them experience some types of dying by other players as bad, and others as good.

Players who were new to the game and had limited literacy about how to play (such as where they could easily find food) also referred with frustration to deaths they attributed to their own "incompetence"; one player, for instance, expressed a desire to "play more to get better to the point that the deaths

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

that happen will be really memorable as in epic battles and betrayals rather than die through a small bug."

Deaths due to glitches are a clear example of play that is not discernible. Examples of glitches mentioned in the survey responses included characters dying or breaking legs when climbing a ladder, the game crashing and a character consequently disappearing, and characters falling off a ledge "because the movement mechanic is still a bit weird." In each of these examples, the connection between the player's action (climbing a ladder) and the system's response (killing the character) is not discernible or consistent, thus making the action seem meaningless. Meaningless glitches like these threaten to make all *DayZ* play meaningless, as they open the possibility that any action the player takes may result in death for no discernible reason. It is perhaps for this reason that the occurrence of glitches in *DayZ*—which was released as an alpha (incomplete) game—was so heavily criticized for reducing the coherency of the game world.

Examples of deaths described as "good" were those in which players died in discernible ways. Despite the incredibly negative emotions brought on by permadeath, for players, "it's cool dying by zombies, hunger or illness." Zombies are weak, but fighting them can be risky, as the wounds they inflict can become infected, and such a loss of health can mean the difference between life and death. However, zombies are also slow and predictable, their movements and aggression clearly recognizable. Hunger and illness in *DayZ* are similarly discernible to players, where actions (not eating food) have discernible outcomes (starvation, leading to death).

While for some, "every death is enjoyable," players often referred to certain specific ways of being killed by other players as "good." The notion of a "fair fight" was often invoked to

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

qualify player deaths as "good," as well as similar references to "epic battles" or "duels." Discernibility is an integral component of a fair fight, as a fair fight is one that players know they are in. This similarly explains one player's extremely positive account of being "hunted through buildings for ten minutes" before being killed, despite not having any ammunition. The player described this as one of their most memorable gaming experiences.

Social experiences that ended in death were also consistently viewed as "good" permadeath, even when players were kidnapped or even "tortured" by other players. Deaths like these generated a unique story, providing players with a discernible narrative context for their death, as well as an unusual story to tell. One of the players I interviewed described his favorite death as having been when his player group chased a lone player through a town "while he taunted us" over the game's proximity chat for close to thirty minutes. In frustration he "ran into a building alone and got shot in the face! This guy worked me up so much I took an unnecessary risk. At least my friends knew where he was then!!!"

This provides another way for thinking about treacherous play in *DayZ* as an ethical way to play. Death after deception and betrayal was for some the most "memorable" and "fun" way of dying, because deaths of this kind meet the criteria of meaningful play. While my friend Andrew (who messaged me the opening quote of the chapter one night after dying) was frustrated at being killed after helping someone, the death was meaningful. His actions (offering to help another player) had a discernible outcome (he got betrayed) and were coherent with the game's dystopian zombie-apocalypse theme. Betrayal is a form of "mere violence" better aligned with a player's desire for struggle than just killing someone on sight.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Like the high-consequence configuration of death, the possibility of betrayal was controversial. One respondent described the following situation as their "least favorite interaction in *DayZ*":

> I helped someone who I found, who had very little gear compared to me. Helped him gear up for 30mins then he found a gun and didn't announce it to me. First opportunity he got he shot me. The effort I put in made it feel worse, the betrayal of initial friendship.

I feel for this player, I really do. The betrayal is brutal, but in the context of *DayZ*, it is congruent with the game's appeal, and a discernible outcome of the player's actions. As another respondent noted in response to the same question, "You get angry about it at the time but it's all good afterwards and it is a part of the game and you should be careful about trusting people." In the same way that the high stakes of death add adrenaline and allow players to experience "real" negative emotions of fear and adrenaline, this player's investment in an ad hoc collaboration increased the stakes of play. The same player described the following as their "favorite interaction in *DayZ*":

> Finding 2 other players and gearing up to go to the NWAF [a high-end area of the game]. Played for around 5 hours together using various tactics, but also debating various moves and what to do, especially surrounding interactions with other players we encountered.

Here we see how the possibility of betrayal transforms the experience of positive social interactions in the game. In the same way that the fear of death makes players value a simple item like a water bottle much more, so too does the fear of betrayal make players value their trust with another player. As Hilmar noted in the context of *EVE Online*, "if betraying trust does not have severe consequences, then giving trust doesn't really mean anything." Games like *DayZ* and *EVE* offer players

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

the ability to experience being betrayed, because betrayal in both games "is as real as in reality."[28]

Despite being ruthlessly betrayed, Andrew would go on to trust others again. It seems counterintuitive to trust at all in a game like *DayZ*, but this is where the role-play effect of *DayZ*'s permadeath feature affects the social experience of the game. With no connection between each character, players often spoke about playing each life differently.[29] After losing a well-equipped character who had played cautiously and slowly, the next might be aggressive and reckless, looking for a quick fight. So too did players speak of playing "a good character" or role-playing an "evil life." Betrayal does not break these roles but becomes a congruent part of the story of a character's life.

To sum up, winning *DayZ* is not about achieving a goal but about having a *good death*, a death that complements and is coherent with the dystopian theme of the game, and betrayal is a *great death*. Treacherous play raises the stakes of trusting other survivors in the zombie apocalypse, adding tension and fear to more aspects of the game. Assessing the ethics of betrayal based on its negative experience overlooks the fact that the *lusory struggle* we seek when playing competitive games is not always fair or always pleasurable. Games like *DayZ* and *EVE Online* exemplify the pleasure we can take in frustrating deaths and devastating betrayals, and the appeal of exploring the friction between what is right and wrong in game worlds.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

4 *Survivor*: Treacherous Play as a Spectator Sport

> Russell. This hurts me. We got nothing in common. You played an unethical game. Admittedly! Played an unethical game! The crazy thing about it is that you're sitting there, and I'm standing here. Did you get to the right place by behaving the wrong way? I've never been in a situation in my entire life where that was the case, but you sit there proud of it.
>
> —Erik, *Survivor: Samoa* (2009), Final Tribal Council

Survivor, the television series produced by CBS in the United States, turns treacherous play into a spectator sport. Created in 1994 by Charlie Parsons (but first aired on television as the 1997 Swedish show *Expedition Robinson*), the US *Survivor* (2000) has been renewed into its forty-second season with over forty regional versions, all of which follow the same loose structure: players making and breaking promises about their anonymous votes at each episode's Tribal Council, where a player is eliminated.

Although the show is typically lumped in with "reality television" (and voyeur television shows like *Jersey Shore* or *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*), the appeal of *Survivor* comes not from the overexaggerated shenanigans of the contestants or

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

manufactured drama but from seeing how the game will play out with roughly the same set of rules each season. Each episode's physical challenge is expertly designed to produce compelling drama, but the game of *Survivor* is played out in its social interactions. Like scamming in *EVE Online*, winning in *Survivor* is about my ability to deceive you, and your ability to detect my deception. *Survivor* just turns the players' thirty-nine-day ordeal into highly watchable forty-minute episodes of TV.

This way of understanding *Survivor* as a spectator sport helps make sense of its ongoing appeal. With two seasons a year since 2000, *Survivor* still maintains more than seven million prime-time viewers in the United States alone. Richard Crew's 2006 research into *Survivor* audiences found that the "realness" of *Survivor* was key to its appeal, as was its unpredictability and fairness.[1] *Survivor* fans talk about *Survivor* the way people talk about sport, critiquing strategies and making predictions about who will come out on top. *Survivor* shows that social skills can be part of the competition of multiplayer games, and the pervasiveness of deception and betrayal makes the show a fascinating site to understand the appeal and ethics of treachery in more detail.

In this chapter, I focus on Final Tribal Council, where a jury of eliminated players vote for the winner—the Sole Survivor—from the remaining two to three players. This is an unusual mechanism for deciding the winner of a multiplayer game, particularly when a prize of one million dollars is at stake. Typically, in competitive games, hard-coded rules like "highest points scored" or "last player standing" dictate who wins. In *Survivor* players are given little guidance on how to choose who should win, basing their decisions only on the knowledge they have garnered when playing, when watching each Tribal Council, and from the other eliminated players. This

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

mechanism means that in *Survivor* the player who played the best hand with the cards they were dealt can win, rather than the player who was dealt the best hand.

For our goal of better understanding treacherous play, this observation is extremely useful. In *DayZ* and *EVE Online*, treachery can occur without consequence,[2] but in *Survivor* it is guaranteed to come back to bite you. The power dynamic between the betrayers and the betrayed is entirely different. Final Tribal Councils provide a fascinating insight into the process by which *Survivor* players value treachery among the different ways of playing the game. The finalists' speeches variously attempt to increase the value of their play (and devalue their opponents' play) to win the million-dollar prize, and subsequent conversations with the jury further reveal the preconceptions and biases players have toward deception, betrayal, honesty, and how players draw on moral constructs to value play, even in a game so implicitly and inherently dishonest as *Survivor*.[3]

Treacherous Play in *Survivor*

If you are unfamiliar with the structure, the *Lord of the Flies*–esque competition of *Survivor* divides sixteen to twenty players (or "castaways") into two teams (or "tribes") on a remote (typically tropical) location with limited food, water, and supplies and no contact with the outside world. A season involves approximately thirty-nine days of isolation, with each televised episode covering the events of about three days of play. A lot of small variation occurs between seasons, but here I will describe the typical structure.

Each episode has at least one "challenge," an elaborate physical or intellectual test of the castaway's strength, agility,

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

teamwork, and puzzle-solving abilities. At first, players compete as tribes, with the losing team sent to Tribal Council, where host Jeff Probst questions contestants about the events of the past three days, and players vote privately and anonymously on who should be eliminated from the game. All players must vote and cannot vote for themselves, and players form ad hoc alliances to avoid being eliminated. Whoever receives the most votes immediately departs, with Probst's catchphrase "The tribe has spoken . . . It's time for you to go."

Once six to eight castaways have been eliminated, the two tribes are merged. At this point, "tribal immunity is no more," and castaways compete in the challenges for individual immunity. Sometimes they face extra reward challenges, with prizes ranging from food, time spent with loved ones, or unique experiences (generally also involving food). Often host Probst will tempt castaways with a food reward during immunity challenges, seeing players give up their chance to compete for individual immunity in exchange for a reward.

Castaways eliminated after the merge join the jury, returning each Tribal Council to (silently) observe the game unfold, with their silent reactions as spectators incorporated as part of the atmosphere and narrative of each vote. Once only two or three players are left, the power in the game returns to the eliminated players on the jury, who get to vote on who should be awarded the million-dollar prize. Each member of the jury then gets to question (or often just rant at) the remaining castaways. Once the questioning is complete, the jury privately votes for the winner, who is revealed during a live show, several months after filming. Colluding and making agreements about sharing the prize are explicitly disallowed in the applicant agreement contracts.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

An enormous amount of fascinating strategizing, metagaming, and competition constructs a season of *Survivor*, much of it far beyond the scope of this chapter. Various elements of the show are controversial, from its perpetuation of a specific kind of "caveman masculinity"[4] and its treatment and depiction of women[5] to its primitivism[6] and the spectacularizing of race.[7] The focus on betrayal was controversial when the show was first launched; during *Survivor*'s second season, the *LA Times* ran an article with the headline "Why You Shouldn't Let Your Children Watch 'Survivor,'" since "the language on *Survivor* is all about backstabbing," suggesting that it "validates toxic values for our young."[8] Rarely now, however, is this the focus of any critique.

Nevertheless, countless blogs, fan sites, and discussion forums fill each season with endless volumes of commentary, critique, and predictions.[9] Over time, different strategies and trends change the way the game is played each cycle, but few changes to the structure of the show have been made. The first season of *Survivor* was a cultural phenomenon—fifty million Americans watched the season finale—and each ongoing season continues to draw millions of viewers.

Treacherous play is an inherent part of *Survivor*. Anonymous voting provides an opportunity for deception and betrayal, with contestants variously promising their votes and making alliances they will often break. Although contestants are all working against one another—only one player can win the million-dollar prize—ad hoc collaborations and alliances are a key part of playing *Survivor*. Promises must be made, and promises will be broken, but a specific promise can always be kept. To betray one player is to choose not to betray another. It is *personal*, and reactions from players often reflect the

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

assumptions that treacherous play is unethical and antisocial and reflects badly on the player's "real" identity.

Is *Survivor* a Game?

Can we compare the treachery in *Survivor* to a first-person shooter like *DayZ*? Or a massively multiplayer online game like *EVE Online*? Or is *Survivor* more akin to something like pro wrestling, where the contest and the outcomes are predetermined and closely designed, and thus incomparable? I argue that we can approach *Survivor* as a game, mostly thanks to the 1950s US quiz show *Twenty-One* (1956–1958).

In the 1950s, several "big money" quiz shows on television were involved in controversy after allegations that producers had rigged the outcomes of the contest. While it later emerged that many shows were unduly influenced, one of the most egregious cases was *Twenty-One*, which involved two players bidding to answer questions at different difficulty levels to be the first to score twenty-one points. In US congressional hearings investigating *Twenty-One* and other rigged quiz shows, former contestants revealed that almost every aspect of the show was choreographed: what answers to give, what to say to the host, and what answers to get wrong to keep popular players on the show and manufacture drama.[10] After these scandals, the US Communications Act of 1934 was amended in 1960 with the "Quiz Show Statute" (47 USC § 509), which stipulates:

> (a) It shall be unlawful for any person, with intent to deceive the listening or viewing public—
>
> (1) To supply to any contestant in a purportedly bona fide contest of intellectual knowledge or intellectual skill any special and secret assistance whereby the outcome of such contest will be in whole or in part prearranged or predetermined.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

As a result, it is highly likely that—at least in the United States—the producers of *Survivor* are extremely limited in their capacity to predetermine or interfere with the outcome of the show. After thirty-six seasons, only one contestant—Stacey Stillman, from the very first season, *Survivor: Borneo*—has filed a lawsuit against the show, alleging that producer Mark Burnett "directly solicited" players to vote against her. The media law scholar Kimberlianne Podlas concluded that the assistance Stillman alleges "would be illegal," in violation of 47 USC § 509.[11] The suit settled out of court, and there has not been one since from any of the subsequent 590 players.

Of course, the producers of *Survivor* might influence or shape the way the game unfolds in many other ways beyond directing votes: choosing to introduce, or not introduce, advantages or twists; asking pointed questions in one-on-one interviews; deploying challenges that play to a particular player's strengths; and so on. When these decisions influence the outcome of the contest of *Survivor*, they may violate the statute, but on-the-fly changes do not preclude the show from being a game. Without getting bogged down in an attempt to provide yet another definition of what does or does not constitute a "game," I will say that there is certainly a game being played out in there somewhere, a contest of intellectual and social skill, responsive to whatever challenges emerge.

Nevertheless, the distillation of three days of social interaction into a forty-minute spectate-able episode, with cohesive narrative, does obscure our ability to view and understand the underlying gameplay. However, it still allows us to study treacherous play in a third context. What we are accessing when we examine a season of *Survivor* is the mediated, produced version of a game that was definitely played out on an island in the South Pacific.[12]

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Acknowledging this limitation is not necessarily a weakness; it just places some limits on the types of claims we can make when studying a game-cum-TV-show like *Survivor*. I focus here on the debates and deliberations at Final Tribal Council, via a close analysis of eight seasons (transcribed and coded), illuminated by postshow interviews with players and online forum discussion on *Survivor* fan sites. This research would not allow me to make claims about, say, the strength of certain strategies over others, but it does allow us to access the ways treacherous play is treated and valued by players of *Survivor*. So some things might be obscured, and the importance of some things might be exaggerated, but *Survivor* is such a big deal, and the most popular and best-known example of treacherous play, that it would be dishonest—a betrayal, even—not to explore what the show can reveal about treacherous play.

Bitter Betrayal

> You will not get my vote, my vote will go to Richard. And I hope that is the one vote that makes you lose the money. If it's not, so be it, I'll shake your hand and I'll go on from here. But if I were to ever pass you along in life again and you were laying there dying of thirst I would not give you a drink of water, I would let the vultures take you and do whatever they want with you, with no ill regrets.
> —Sue, *Survivor: Borneo* (2000), Final Tribal Council

Survivor is no exception to any of the other "feel-bad games"—a term coined by Staffan Björk for the unusually negative emotions they provoke in players—I have discussed so far. Comments like Sue's from *Survivor*'s first season are common; jurors will frequently avoid voting for contestants who have betrayed

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

them, and the "bitter betty" (Michaela, season 34)—a player who refuses to vote for stronger players who have betrayed them personally—heavily influences who has won many seasons of *Survivor*.

Take, for instance, Russell Hantz, who played in seasons 19 and 20 of *Survivor*. Hantz was an incredibly aggressive player in S19, making moves like burning his teammates' socks to make them more miserable, and therefore more manipulable. Unsurprisingly his tribe, Foa Foa, lost the majority of tribal immunity challenges, making the merge with only four players left against an insurmountable alliance of eight Galu players. Hantz ensured through deception, betrayal, and the correct use of hidden immunity idols that the next seven votes saw Galu players eliminated, only having to vote out one of his own teammates because the last remaining Galu player—Brett Clouser—won individual immunity. Hantz won the next individual immunity, ensuring his place at the Final Tribal Council with three of his former Foa Foa members.

Season 20—which started five days immediately after the end of season 19—was themed *Heroes vs. Villains*, with two teams of returning players. Since S19 had not aired on television when S20 started, Hantz was the only player who was unknown to his competitors, and host Jeff Probst introduced him as one of the "ten most notorious [players] of all time." Once again Hantz aggressively used deception, betrayal, and hidden immunity idols to eliminate his opponents and control the direction of the game at nearly every vote, reaching the Final Tribal Council two seasons in a row. Hantz is still regularly voted by fans as one of the top players to ever play the game.

Yet Hantz failed to win either season.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Figure 4.1
Survivor players Mick Trimming, Natalie White, and Russell Hantz (left to right).

In S19, Hantz was runner-up 7-2-0 to winner Natalie, who had not orchestrated any of the moves to get players to the end. Natalie won thanks to the closer social relationships she had developed with other players and the ability to get to the end without angering the jury, who were upset by Russell's unashamedly deceptive and manipulative play style. Hantz—not knowing the result of S19, which was unveiled after S20 was filmed—played the same way in *Heroes vs. Villains* and received zero votes (0-3-6) against players Parvati and Sandra, who had both won previous seasons. The heavily manipulated and betrayed jurors again picked a winner who had played *just enough* to survive to the Final Tribal Council while still maintaining good relationships with the jury.

The concept of betrayal aversion (that betrayal incurs an additional loss, a negative emotional experience because people care about how outcomes come to be, not just what the outcome is) does help us understand the bitter-juror phenomenon. CBS uploads "Ponderosa" videos—short online clips

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

that follow players to show their reaction to being voted out—that clearly show how significantly upset players are when blindsided by a betrayal, like the *DayZ* player breaking their keyboard. Yet in *Survivor* this upset affects not only the immediate emotional response but the final "rational" vote that is made weeks later. Reactions to betrayal can fully shape the way players view and understand the game. In the subsequent two sections, I unpack a little more the ways that treachery receives such an extraordinary reaction, building further on the insights into treacherous play that we developed when examining *DayZ* and *Survivor*.

None of this is to say that Hantz should have beaten Natalie or Sandra. At the reunion of *Heroes vs. Villains*, Hantz argued that his not winning either season was "a flaw in the game," arguing that the public should get a share of the vote for who wins a season. In reply, Jeff Probst points out:

> Our show is not that. Our show is very clearly defined in that you take a group of people, you put them in one situation, you vote out people, and in the end, the last group, the jury, decides who deserves it. This isn't a game in which you include America, that's a different game. So you haven't won this game. Maybe you would win that game.[13]

This was a point similarly made by Erik, a juror in S19 who argued that there is no reason Natalie's "weak" style of play should be considered "less admirable than lying, cheating and stealing." One of the pervasive issues of *Survivor* is that some styles of play (such as playing a social or quiet game) are gendered feminine and subsequently devalued against the more masculine-gendered aggressive, loud, and physical ways of playing *Survivor*.[14] This is not something that is baked into the rules of the game; the way play is valued in *Survivor* reflects the society and culture in which it is played.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

While Hantz has never won a season of *Survivor* (having had two more attempts, once more on the US version and once on the Australian version), his aggressive play in seasons 19 and 20 has had the effect of normalizing the presence of treacherous play in *Survivor*. *Heroes vs*. *Villains* is considered one of the best seasons of *Survivor*, and a large part of its popularity is due to Hantz's aggressive and betrayal-driven play. Russell has returned so many times because he is enjoyable to watch; his treachery is a core part of his appeal. After his first two seasons, fans of the game celebrated his entertaining style of play and admonished the jurors who had been "too bitter" to vote for him, subsequently carving a path for other players like him.

Bad Treachery, Good Treachery

Since treachery isn't universally condemned, one of the ways that we can use *Survivor* to better understand treacherous play is by looking at how it is valued positively and negatively at Final Tribal Council.[15] The process of arguing about which of the remaining three players should win the million-dollar prize makes transparent the moral economy of the game: the intersubjective moral constructs, ideologies, and hierarchies the players have about what is "good" and "bad" in the context of playing with deception and betrayal. The contextual ways in which treacherous play is sometimes condemned and sometimes applauded highlight the nature of our aversion to betrayal and unveil the ethics of betraying in a treacherous game.

Good Treachery

Over the thirty-eight seasons of US *Survivor*, several treacherous players have won the game. Hantz's aggressive season 19

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

helped to normalize the presence of treacherous play in *Survivor* and remind jurors (who are often big fans of the game) that they will be critiqued afterward if they are perceived to have let their hurt feelings influence their votes. In the seasons I analyzed, treacherous play was viewed positively in a few different ways.

First, treacherous play could be good if it was strategic. In a broad sense, strategic play has two dimensions in *Survivor*. In one way, it is presented as the art of planning multiple moves in advance, where it highlights a contestant's prescience, and where players can fit their decisions into a larger and more impressive narrative of *Survivor* play. The second way strategy is conceptualized is in terms of control and centrality, where players always vote the right way (since they were controlling what the right way was) or where their decision-making can be placed in the center of the game's pivotal votes.

In season 8, finalist "Boston Rob" defends his betrayal of his alliance as being both preemptive and retaliatory, arguing, "Yeah, I broke the alliance, but you bartered to get me kicked off beforehand, and I found out first, so I got rid of you before you had the chance to get rid of me." In season 16, runner-up Amanda similarly defends her betrayal of juror Erik because he was "unloyal" and was also trying to get her voted out. In these examples, betrayal is strategic because contestants were able to predict when the trust they were placing in another contestant had become misplaced—using a relationship only for as long as it was useful.

Such is the nature of treacherous play in *Survivor* that it is typically central to the story of a season, since a successful betrayal can significantly change the game's unfolding narrative. Finalists are often praised when they always vote the correct way, since if you always know the right way to vote,

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

it's because you're involved in directing the right way to vote. This is often linked to the way that actively playing the game is so important; players can't be seen to have coasted their way into the final three by "riding on coattails" (Ozzy, S13).

Finalists also try to minimize strategies to depersonalize their betrayals. According to this logic, betrayal is often justified when it is part of a larger plan, when it (flatteringly) removes a contestant's "biggest competition" (Richard, S01) for the prize at the final vote. Alternatively, it is minimized, as when Courtney defended going along with her alliance's betrayal of Frosty, because not betraying him would not have changed the outcome of that vote. Despite involving the same risks and effort, staying loyal means staying the course, so it cannot occupy the same centrality that a player flipping from one alliance to another does. Loyalty is a shared achievement, whereas betrayal gives the credit to a single person, making them central to the shared understanding of how the game unfolded, and who should get credit.

Bad Treachery

Unsurprisingly, treacherous play is not always received positively. Betrayal is primarily critiqued as being either inherently unethical, where the "ends don't justify the means" (Mick, S19), or unnecessary. The suggestion that betrayal in *Survivor* is unethical often seems to mirror Ian Brooks's argument that betrayal is intrinsically unethical in situations—like *Survivor*—where players develop deep personal friendships with other players.[16] Since these friendships are indistinguishable from real friendships, and since it is unethical to betray a real friend, it is unethical to betray a friend in the game. Contestants are often aware of this, asking jurors to "see the difference between my strategic game and the relations I actually

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

built with you" (Todd, S15). In other words, betraying might be okay, but betraying a friend might not be.

Even jurors who don't feel that their personal relationships were exploited, such as Erik in S19, will critique contestants for having "played an unethical game," with a player's strategy devalued simply because it was based on betrayal and the exploitation of trust. These types of comments fall back on an underlying desire for "good" to win, shaped by the way a player's journey to the end is narrativized so that strategies can be compared. The foundational idea of betrayal aversion is that we don't just care about outcomes; we care about how outcomes come to be. Betrayal in *Survivor* is not just a simple, isolated, and depersonalized game of math as it is in Iris Bohnet and Richard Zeckhauser's experiments. It exists within the context of the game and the player's personality, but it bleeds into the broader cultural context of the American capitalist work ethic; US neoliberal ideas of fitness; and romanticized, historicized notions of chivalry and sportsmanship.

We can see this in the broader ways that positive values about players are attributed to a *Survivor* finalist's efforts, like being "up-front" (JR, S08), "fair" and "honest" (Becky, S13), and being "polite" and having "integrity" (Jonathan, S13). Conversely, traits like being a liar (being "two-faced" and "manipulative" [Sue, S01]), "superficial" (Eliza, S16), "arrogant" (Erik, S19), "nasty" (Andrea, S34), "entitled" (Jonathan, S13), and "ungrateful" (Amanda, S16) work to devalue a player's strategy and chances to win. In this way, we see how the way treachery is valued in the real world outside gameplay becomes part of how it is valued in the game.

Even players who don't think that betrayal is necessarily inherently unethical will critique contestants for having unnecessarily betrayed, a challenge to the logic of their

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

strategy. A common *Survivor* insult is to call someone a "flip-flopper," someone who changes alliances too often. S34 winner Parvati's betrayal-heavy play was critiqued because of "everything that [she] did that was not necessary for strategic advancement in the game" (Eliza, S16), and the S15 runner-up critiqued the winner on the basis that "if he is that good of a strategic player, why didn't he play this game better to where he didn't have to deceive and lie to all these people. He lied too much for me" (Amanda, S15). While betrayal is explicitly permitted, and I would argue encouraged, by the game rules, the fact that it is not absolutely necessary is key: "There is a way to play this game without going as low as you had to go" (Ozzy, S34, about finalist Sarah).

What is particularly interesting about this argument is that the critique of unnecessary betrayal is never applied to other strategies available for winning *Survivor*. Nobody has ever challenged someone for winning "too many" individual immunity challenges or put someone down for being "gratuitously" social. Even when players recognize that a betrayal was necessary, for whatever reason, debates about betrayal still attempt to minimize it in some way, such as by referring to social distance, complicity, and the extent to which players "didn't really break my word to you, as much as [the other contestant] did" (Amber, S8). In this argument, betrayal is always bad, but I just betrayed you *less*.

In addition to being helpful if you ever find yourself at Final Tribal Council, this breakdown of how treacherous play is valued in *Survivor* emphasizes that *choice* is what really distinguishes treacherous play from deception in other games. Betraying a player is extremely personal in *Survivor*, stemming from the fact that players are, after all, choosing to betray you, and not me. To defend betrayal as strategic is to say "I had no

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

choice," and to critique someone for having been only dishonest is to emphasize that, actually, they did have a choice. It is this element of choice—choosing to be a treacherous player—that leads to the third assumption people make about treacherous play.

Are You How You Play *Survivor*?

Kelly: Russell. You've said many times you're going to lie, cheat, and steal your way through this game. Does that apply to your real life also?

Russell: No, not at all. I am one hundred percent different outside this game. The thing that bothered me is that I don't want my kids to think that this is how I really am. I'm not like this at all; I'm a totally different person outside this game.

Kelly: Instead of lie, cheat, and steal in real life, maybe what are three words that would replace that.

Russell: It might be hard to believe, but honor, integrity, and loyalty.

Kelly: Russell, it's hard for me to sit here and believe that from you. Honor, integrity, and loyalty is the most important thing to you.

—*Survivor: Samoa* (2009), Final Tribal Council

While some seasons of *Survivor* involve returning players who have socialized outside the game, most seasons involve total strangers. The result is that *Survivor* gives us an opportunity to explore the assumption that the way we play a game suggests something about who we are in real life. In S01, betrayed jurors Sue and Lex argued that "this game exposes who we are as people to the core" (Lex, S01), and that runner-up Kelly's behavior in the game showed juror Sue "the true person that

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

you are" (Sue, S01): strikes against their chances of winning. While this is typically used to devalue a player, in S34 (with returning players) Brad juxtaposed his athletic and loyal play style as being simply because "that's who I am," versus his opponent's betrayal-driven play style. My goal here is not to prove whether *Survivor* players are good or bad people but to use *Survivor* to unveil some of the inherent (and possibly unresolvable) tensions that exist around treacherous play.

The viciously negative attacks we see, such as the one between Kelly and Russell earlier, can be attributed to the unusual length and intimacy of *Survivor*. Players are marooned together in unusual and inhospitable conditions for thirty-nine days—nearly six weeks. These are, as noted earlier, real friendships. In season 36, on day 31 player Christian expressed disbelief that his closest ally, Gabby, was mobilizing votes against him, exclaiming, "Gabby and I have been together for this entire game. We haven't been separated for more than hour. . . . I have a hard time believing it." Clearly a massive difference exists between the intimacy of an hour-long, digitally mediated *EVE Online* scam and a *Survivor* betrayal. Hungry, cold, and tired, the players' real-life identities inevitably become interwoven with their in-game behavior and the decisions they make as players. *Survivor* players also have the external motivation of a million dollars, which cannot justify a *DayZ* player's actions.

One possible explanation of how contestants' play of *Survivor* is connected to who they are in real life is implicit in Lyn Abramson's attribution theory. In chapter 2, I argued that this theory helps explain why *EVE Online* players get more upset over losing a ship to a scam than in combat, even though the consequences are the same. The visceral upset a *Survivor* player exhibits after being voted out can also be explained in the

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

same way. Misplacing trust in *Survivor* is an internal, possibly stable, and global inadequacy, since the skills of social interaction and detecting deception are personal ones that apply equally to the game and real life. Players cannot attribute their failure to an external factor; it is their own fault. This therefore represents an example of a bad kind of failure, one that is hard to enjoy. But why does this influence how a juror votes at Final Tribal Council?

With time to reflect at Ponderosa—the resort where eliminated players wait out the end of the game in isolation from the wider world—players might begin wondering why their skills at social interaction and deception were not up to scratch. Since players are unlikely to enjoy the learned helplessness of a bad failure, it may be inevitable that they attribute their failure to an external factor. Recall, for example, Russell Hantz's claim at the reunion show that his not winning meant there was "a flaw in the game." Another option is for players to rationalize their failure at *Survivor* as being due to the fact that they are, in the game and in real life, an honest person. While it is a global inadequacy, it might not be a stable one, either; if they played *Survivor* again, they might do a better job the second time around. Returning players do generally play a lot better than novice ones. Novices are just not practiced at betrayal; they have not learned how to do it in real life. That's okay; it's not an inadequacy that matters. In fact, it's an inadequacy to be proud of.

The finalists, though: how did they get so good at it?

The following thought process tracks Lyn Abramson's argument about how we respond to failure, and goes a long way in explaining why treacherous play is so often seen as reflecting poorly on who you are in real life. Being able to deceive players into misplacing their trust in *Survivor* is a skill,

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

one shared with being deceptive in real life. We have all seen this ourselves; some people are just *terrible* liars. They might make up lies that are just way too big and complicated or can be picked apart with a few questions. Or maybe they will get embarrassed, blush, or refuse to make eye contact when they're lying. If you can lie straight to my face on *Survivor* for three days straight without my realizing it, and then vote me out, this is not your first lie.

A great example of this in action is finalist Sarah in S34, which featured twenty returning players. Sarah had played aggressively and had been the key vote in several betrayals that had changed the course of the game. In one episode, one of her allies, Sierra, shared with Sarah that she had a secret "legacy advantage" that gives immunity at specific votes, and if you are voted out before using it, you can bequeath the advantage to another player still in the game. Sierra had misplaced her trust; Sarah used this information to have Sierra voted out at the next Tribal Council but feigned enough surprise to convince Sierra to will the advantage to her. Sarah was then able to play it at the final six to save herself. She was not only central to how the game unfolded but in control as well; she knew who was going home at every Tribal Council.

Unsurprisingly, jurors were upset at Sarah over the close relationships she had built and manipulated. Her way of playing was depicted as being inherently unethical, with jurors arguing that "there is a way to play this game without going as low as you had to go" (Ozzy, S34). While commending her for the "brilliant game moves" that got her to the end, Andrea critiqued Sarah for how she "convinced everyone that they were your best friend. . . . You brought people's personal feeling into it and emotions, and I feel, it feels kind gross" (Andrea, S34). Other jurors questioned Sarah's behavior, showing shock at

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

the relationships she had formed with everyone in the game, believing their relationship with Sarah was genuine, "real" (Tai, S34), and why they thought they could trust her. When Sarah defended these relationships, saying, "I want everyone over there to know my personal relationships were a hundred percent real from the bottom of my heart" (Sarah, S34), the jury burst out in laughter, and a juror later asked what "allows you to say this is real Sarah, this is game Sarah" (Aubrey, S34).

Here lies the key—perhaps unresolvable—tension with betrayal in games, and why treacherous play receives a level of criticism that other types of transgressive play do not. There is clearly a perception (as Ian Brooks has argued in the context of *EVE*) that the "real" friendships developed during gameplay are independent of whatever norms, processes, or rules of gameplay make betrayal acceptable. Miguel Sicart argues that when we play, we create a "player-self," a subidentity that helps resolve the contradictions between our values in everyday life (where betrayal is not okay) and our values when playing a game (where betrayal is okay).[17] Since Sarah had built what were perceived to be "real" friendships, that is, friendships that exceeded the player-self and were incorporated into her "real-self," all her actions in game were viewed in the context of the values of her everyday life. As a result, the jurors felt she had transgressed in betraying them.

When viewed through the lens of attribution theory, the distinction between Sarah and the frustrated jurors was her exceptional ability to build these seemingly genuine relationships while still being willing to betray them when she needed to: a distinction between real Sarah and game Sarah, a global adequacy the jurors were hesitant to reward. At Final Tribal Council, Sarah ended up arguing that the way she played *Survivor* indeed reflected who she was in real life. She claimed

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

that her capacity to socially manipulate and establish clear boundaries "comes from being a police officer for the last ten years" (Sarah, S34). She argued that "when you're undercover you have to shut off who you are and be someone else. You're buying drugs, you're a drug user now. If you're a prostitute, you're now a prostitute. I have to play a role of someone that I am not." In part because she was able to provide this excuse—ethical to the jurors—for having the global adequacy at deception and betrayal, Sarah was able to win the final vote 7-3-0.

As *Survivor* evolves and matures over time, the tensions around treacherous play come no closer to resolution. Attribution theory helps us understand why players seek an external explanation for a finalist's masterful skills of deception and betrayal, but the players themselves also grapple with what their play within the game implies about them in real life. In interviews before his appearance on Australian *Survivor* in 2018, Russell Hantz said, "I stayed that person"—meaning his ruthless *Survivor* persona—"for years after and that is just not a good person in real life," attributing this behavior to his divorce.[18] During S40 (a season of returning winners), Sarah described how, for two years after S34, she "felt like I was such a bad person" because of how she had played, and many players have discussed the real-life consequences of being portrayed as a *Survivor* villain. In the S40 finale, Ben echoed the sentiment, claiming that he returned for S40 wanting "to be a more positive person, you know, represent my family in a better light and walk away from this experience with friends," subsequently giving Sarah (his close ally) permission to vote him out to help her win, in complete opposition to his aggressive and individual play style in S35. Playing games is an act of moral interpretation, and despite the shared intentionality

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

of *Survivor* players to engage in treacherous play, the permeability of the "player-self"—with its ability to form genuine friendships—introduces complicated emotions and experiences that may have no clear resolution.

Makes for great television, though.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

5 Designing Treacherous Play

The three games I have discussed so far—*DayZ*, *EVE Online*, and *Survivor*—are all examples of what I consider to be *successful* games with treacherous play, in that deception and betrayal contribute to the games' appeal and commercial success. In *DayZ*, the possibility of treacherous play provided new and unique player-driven social experiences that took the gaming world by storm. Scamming and espionage in *EVE Online* are part of what makes the eighteen-year-old sci-fi MMOG *real*, key to its niche but ongoing appeal to paying subscribers. For *Survivor*—renewed now into its forty-first season—the thrill and challenge of a contest grounded in deception and betrayal have allowed the show to transcend reality TV and become spectator sport. In this chapter, I survey these games to identify and draw attention to the design patterns that enable successful treacherous play.[1] My purpose here is not to argue that more games should enable treachery but to simply identify the key patterns—the design causes and consequences—that seem to be crucial for this style of play, which can help understand the broader design of social and evocative play like treachery.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Treacherous Design Patterns

The first and perhaps foremost treacherous play design pattern is that **relationships between players must be ambiguous**. In the majority of games, the relationships between players are formally designated by the game's rules. In a game of soccer, you are either on team A or on team B, with no ambiguity. You can score a goal for the other team, but you can't switch sides halfway through the match. In most first-person shooter games, attacking players on your own team is disabled. Betrayal is coded out of the game. When you join *World of Warcraft*, the race of your character assigns you permanently to either Horde or Alliance, so you don't need to worry that the Tauren shaman approaching might be a spy. If it turns out that the player is a thief and can't be trusted, you can complain to an official game moderator, who will return any stolen goods and ban the player from the game. In all these examples, coded and formal rules ensure that trust between teammates is explicit.

This is, of course (admittedly by definition), not the case with treacherous play, where player relationships are defined by the players themselves and not enforced by coded or formal rules. Another player in *DayZ* is ambiguously friend or foe, someone with whom you could trade, form an ad hoc collaboration, and enhance the sociality of your play—or someone who might betray you the moment you turn around. You are required to make a decision about your relationship with a player. *EVE* takes this concept to a grand scale with its global alliances of thousands of players, but it is in essence the same design pattern of ambiguous social relationships. It is the responsibility of players to decide their relationships to other players: which players to trust, which corporations to

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

join, and which alliances to fight. While *Survivor* players are unambiguously enemies—only one can win the million-dollar prize—getting to the Final Tribal Council requires coordination between players at each successive Tribal Council. The conflict that arises from these decisions provides the player-driven conflict that keeps *EVE* and *Survivor* fresh.

Quite a few games feature deception and betrayal but do not meet the criteria of treacherous play because it is *necessary* to betray and deceive someone. In the game *Among Us*, one or more players are assigned the role of impostor. While other players complete tasks in a virtual spaceship, the impostor attempts to kill as many people as possible without drawing attention and being ejected from the ship. The impostor's task is simple: lie and pretend to be a nonimpostor player and survive to kill again. If the players successfully kill all the impostors, they win. The impostor player is deceiving and betraying, but this is required by the game. The relationships between players are not ambiguous, thus removing the friction that emerges when players have to reconcile that an act of betrayal is a conscious choice.

The second design pattern is that **players must be able to openly communicate with one another**, an uncommon feature in online games.[2] One of the primary ways that the relationships between players are established is by limiting communication to only teammates. After all, what purpose is there for communicating with your opponents beyond smack talking, trolling, and the occasional "good game" at the end of a match? I don't have anything particularly nice to say to the player who just killed me in *Call of Duty*, and I definitely don't have any interest in what they have to say to me. The majority of online games limit player-to-player communication in some way, and those that do not often face issues

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

with in-game harassment.[3] In a landscape of online environments permeated by annoying voices, frustrating spam, and unrelenting harassment, the decision to limit communication between players to teammates (in the short term) and agreed friends or guild mates (in the long term) makes perfect sense. Allow communication with other players where it is expected to add value—coordinating with teammates, socializing with friends—and limit it where it isn't.

On the one hand, this may explain why treachery is associated with hostile or toxic online communities. The same facility for open communication provides opportunity for harassment, gatekeeping, and abuse. As an off-line game, *Survivor* obviously has no such restrictions, enabling the sociality of the game to become part of its contest. But both *DayZ* and *EVE Online* are characterized by a highly homogeneous player base, with uncharacteristically low numbers of female players. Open communication (and the opportunity to exploit it) might allow for the kinds of social interactions where treachery is performed, and where trust can be misplaced, but there is clearly a cost to who feels welcome in the game's community.

The third design pattern is that **the game must have interactions that require players to trust one another**. We place surprisingly little trust in the people we play with online; we rarely have to. When I join a player in a multiplayer instance in *Destiny*, I don't gamble that they are actually a member of the Fallen, waiting to betray me. The risk I typically take in multiplayer games is limited to the possibility of a *Rocket League* teammate who leaves the game midmatch to receive an Uber Eats delivery. If I wanted to trade a legendary item in *World of Warcraft*, I could list it at an exact price in the game marketplace, knowing that I could trust that marketplace to make the trade. For treacherous play to be a part of the game

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

experience, trust must be something players can give, with the possibility of it being misplaced.

Survivor requires trust, via its anonymous and simultaneous voting mechanic. It is extremely advantageous to coordinate votes with other players, forming alliances to vote out specific opponents. This requires trust, trust that your opponents will vote with you, which can be misplaced when it turns out they were voting against you. *DayZ* does not require trust in the same way; many of the players we studied engaged in "kill on sight," never entertaining the possibility of trusting someone in the game. Yet some of the interactions in *DayZ* do require trust, such as the blood transfusion item, which can restore the health of an injured character. Other forms of emergent play—socializing, trading, ad hoc collaborations—also require trust, introducing treachery to the game.

A huge breadth of mechanics in *EVE* require trust, most notably in the game's null-sec areas, where the in-game police will not intervene in an unprovoked attack. Players trust the fellow members of their corporations not to shoot them, their fleet commander not to lead them into a trap, their espionage agents to give them useful intelligence, and the alliance leader not to be secretly profiting off their war. The most exciting parts of *EVE*—its large, player-driven wars—are built around trust (and won off misplaced trust). Where trust is not required, a big part of the challenge of scamming is getting players to trust you when they don't actually *need* to trust anyone.[4]

The fourth design pattern is that **play must be consequential**. When we make a mistake in most games, the consequences are surprisingly minor, meaning we lose very little as a result of our failures. Dying is a minor inconvenience, a few seconds of delay before you can respawn and rejoin the fight, or the game might simply reload at an earlier save point, a safe

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

moment a few seconds before you died. Games typically will not let you kill a character crucial to the story line; you can't accidentally lock yourself out of the narrative with a murderous spree.[5] Generally you have more than one opportunity to play the game. You can't make the wrong decision as a *Sim City* mayor and be permanently banned from any further leadership roles. An erroneous city-planning decision can be quickly and cheaply undone. While a few interesting games have played around with consequences—my favorite is Zach Gage's *Lose/Lose*, a *Space Invaders* clone that deletes a file on your computer each time an alien is killed—games typically minimize or avoid them entirely.

It is not a coincidence that *DayZ*, *EVE*, and *Survivor* are all games characterized by the high consequence of their play. When you die in *DayZ*, your character is permanently dead; you respawn without your items on the beach of the game's vast virtual world. If you're lucky, you might be able to sprint to your corpse and loot any items your assailant didn't want, but any case of death in *DayZ* is much more than a minor inconvenience. *Survivor* is like a battle royale game that you only get to play once in your life; no matter how you get voted out, once the "tribe has spoken," you are eliminated permanently.[6] If your ship is destroyed in *EVE*, it turns into a wreck, salvageable by the next pilot to come by. The value of that ship is permanently lost, ranging from the equivalent of a few cents to a few thousand dollars. Although your character doesn't die (it is respawned "from a clone"), you can also lose thousands of skill points and abilities.[7]

Like these other aspects of the game, treacherous play is also consequential. If you destroy my ship while I am mining asteroids, or if you steal it from me in a scam, the consequences are the same. As far as I am concerned, that ship

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

is gone permanently. If I defeat your massed fleet in combat and take from your alliance a prized strategic solar system, it has the same consequence irrespective of whether I won that battle through subterfuge or my exceptional abilities at flying internet spaceships. Any means of leaving *Survivor*, be it medical emergency, a unanimous and open vote, or a vote predicated on layers of deception and betrayal, has the same consequence. Death in *DayZ* is not worse because of betrayal, but in some cases better. The loss of advancement is weighed against the richer and more meaningful death story that it provides. As a result, the high consequences of betrayal in these games do not stand out from other ways of losing. This works to legitimate it as a strategy and integrates it as a coherent part of the overall *feel* of playing the game.

Treacherous play must also take place within the rules of the game. Acts of deception and trickery happen widely across online games where such play is against the rules, but the experiences of treacherous play accounted for in this book demand that it falls within the rules of the game. The expectation of betrayal is necessary for it to be part of the contest of playing a treacherous game, as it is in *EVE*, *DayZ*, and *Survivor*. *EVE Online* scammers, who describe their unusual way of navigating their virtual world as "playing people," demonstrated how it was necessary for their enjoyment that their play occurred within the rules. If it didn't, why bother betraying people in a game where the number one rule is "DON'T TRUST ANYONE"? Much easier marks can be found in other MMOGs, where trust is given without hesitation. Several of the *EVE Online* scammers whom I interviewed even reported returning stolen goods to new players who didn't know that *EVE* was populated with thieves: a lesson given, rather than a pointlessly easy mark. When treacherous play takes place within the

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

rules and therefore is expected, it becomes part of the *lusory challenge* we seek when playing multiplayer games and thus is enjoyable on the same terms as other competitive play.

The example of *Survivor* is slightly different. As a nondigital game, without the restrictions that coded environments can enforce, its formal rules are more strictly enforced by producers. Players are not allowed to physically intimidate or steal from other contestants, and players who break these rules are removed from the game. As I showed through the analysis of Final Tribal Councils, while players do contest the value of treacherous play, permitting treachery works to legitimate it. Since players should *expect* to be deceived (an expectation that has evolved over time), to deceive someone becomes an accomplishment, an example of one of the game's three core tenets and a measure of success: *outwitting*. If a successful betrayal gives players power or propels them to the end of the game, then the advantage gained from the act is clear, legitimating it as a fair strategy.

Two further design patterns shared between the three treacherous games I have covered contribute to the successful inclusion of treacherous play but may not be as necessary. The first is **the inclusion of a dystopian imaginary**. Scholars often take for granted the role that the imaginary (the fictive game world in which gameplay is set) plays in constructing player experience. Imaginaries are the theme of the game, the coherent ecological environments that support, influence, rationalize, and contextualize the actions of the player.[8] They are rarely set out explicitly but are hinted at and built up through costumes, architecture, accents, story events, and intertextual allusions. Their consistency is key to immersion and a player's sense of being in a game world, and just as a mobile phone would confuse the experience and expectations of a *Skyrim* player, so treachery has to fit too.[9]

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

As with the general high consequence of play in treacherous games, it is clear that a dystopian imaginary is crucial to successfully integrating treacherous play. *Survivor* host Jeff Probst has suggested in the show's broadcast that the series is loosely based on *Lord of the Flies* (1954), a novel about a group of British schoolchildren stranded on an uninhabited island, whose attempts at social organization quickly fail, with primitive human instincts causing a quick descent into torture and murder. In this vein—and the collected transtextual imaginaries of shipwrecks, cannibals, and island survival—the betrayals of *Survivor* fit neatly and indeed are justified by this dystopian fiction. *DayZ* is set in a postapocalyptic virtual environment infested with zombies. The Romero-esque starting situation for the player, on the beach with no instructions or items, invokes the dystopian tropes of zombie cinema. Through starting cinematics, advertisements, game trailers, and publicity, *EVE*'s virtual world is also established as a ruthless, hypercapitalistic dystopia. Betrayal and dishonesty are congruent with these imagined worlds, helping set player expectations, guide the moral interpretation of their actions, and shape their experience of treacherous play.

The final game pattern that contributes to the success of treacherous play is a **clear ceiling on what is acceptable in gameplay**. Something that became clear in my studies is that conflict often emerged when players engaged in forms of deception that exceed other players' intersubjective understanding of what is, and is not, acceptable. This was the case in *EVE Online*'s Alliance Tournament IX, in which one team stopped playing and allowed itself to be defeated. It turned out that the two teams had been entered by the same alliance, which had spied, bribed, and manipulated the tournament brackets so that it was guaranteed to win the final. Responding to player outrage, the game's developer implemented new

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

rules to prohibit coordination between teams, but not the spying and espionage that got them to the finals.[10] My point here is that, more than just being *within* the rules, even treacherous play needs to be bounded, and these boundaries help constrain deception and betrayal as play objects rather than boundary-defying play like griefing or cheating.

In *DayZ*, the limits of what can be achieved within the virtual world constrain treacherous play. In the expansive realm of *EVE* gameplay—where much more is possible—the game's developers have placed the ceiling by limiting acceptable betrayal to cases where trust has been *misplaced*, that is, where it has been given where it should not have been.[11] Hacking an opponent's forums is not acceptable, but if access to a forum was given by a player, then exploiting that access for strategic information is okay. Hilmar, the CCP Games CEO, describes this limitation as being guided by the idea that it "has to be within the four walls of the game," which in the case of *EVE Online* include the play that happens in game forums and chat rooms. There is a pervasive rumor (at least, I'm pretty sure it is a rumor) that a player's electricity was turned off in the middle of a battle so that the player's *Titan*-class ship could be destroyed. Since trust was never placed in an opponent that their electricity be left on, this behavior would fall outside what is acceptable and lead to a player being banned. Similarly, *Survivor* is strictly controlled and managed by the producers, with rules against stealing and promising money in exchange for votes, implicitly condoning any other way of getting advantage in the game.[12] Successful treacherous play, then, is not so much about removing the boundaries that constrain player conduct in multiplayer games as about expanding them in a deliberate and designed way.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

6 Treacherous Assumptions

I began the book by identifying the three main assumptions that we commonly make about treacherous play, which offer a useful lens for interrogating it in depth. My intention was not necessarily to dispel these assumptions but to problematize them and use them to explore this unusual and evocative style of play. Here, in the concluding chapter, I revisit these assumptions to examine what a deeper understanding of this style of play might contribute to our critical understanding of games and play more broadly.

Assumption 1: Treacherous Play Is Unethical

The first assumption commonly cast around treacherous play is that it is an unethical way to play.[1] Interrogating this assumption first required us to develop an understanding about what makes play in competitive games ethical at all, provided by Nguyen and Zagal's philosophical framework for the ethics of competition.[2] When we play games, we set lusory goals that are contingent on unnecessary obstacles, and it is ethical for an opponent to provide those obstacles. But can betrayal ever be one of them?

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Treacherous play is counterintuitive from this perspective because moments of betrayal are so harsh, at times cruel and unfair, and the experience so negative. To unpack this, I have explored the way that the broader play of *EVE*, *DayZ*, and *Survivor* mirrors these qualities but remains, arguably, ethical. Death in *DayZ* can be a punishingly harsh experience, and *EVE Online* is known for its reputation as a difficult and ruthless virtual world,[3] one that CCP CEO Hilmar calls "cruel but fair." Particularly in chapter 3, I showed how approaching play from the phenomenological approach of Apter's reversal theory reminds us that the lusory goals we set in games don't have to be outcome based but can be experience based, and Zillmann's excitation transfer effect helps explain how we can experience negative feelings like fear, anxiety, and anger in a positive way.

Betrayal fits into the coherent harsh and brutal aesthetic of these games; the goal of *EVE Online*'s designers was to develop a virtual world that was "as close to real life as you can get," and the presence of betrayal is a key part of that overall design goal.[4] Betrayal makes the game's social interactions and its player-driven wars more real. One of the appealing things about *Survivor* is watching people's character being tested by the sum of the game's challenges: a lack of food and shelter, extremely high-stakes gameplay, and betrayal by close friends. Returning *Survivor* players constantly talk about the personal growth they experience from being tested by this challenge, and the guilt a *DayZ* player feels from killing hints at opportunities for moral growth and exploration.

What treacherous play highlights is that the opportunity to safely experience these aspects of humanity is appealing. Perhaps a more interesting conclusion would be that betraying close friends in treacherous games *is* unethical, but this

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

doesn't mean that treacherous play isn't play and shouldn't be an experience designed into some multiplayer games. What makes treacherous play feel unethical is precisely why it is an interesting form of play, which speaks to the grand potential for games to provide us the opportunity to explore the whole picture of human emotions.

Assumption 2: Treacherous Play Is Antisocial

The second assumption is that treacherous play is antisocial, comparable to toxic behaviors like griefing that pervade online games. This is a reasonable assumption; exploiting someone's misplaced trust in most online games is a common form of griefing, of boundary keeping that works to push specific kinds of people out of online games and homogenize game cultures. We can all imagine, or might even have encountered, the experience of being betrayed in a game by someone whom we thought we could trust; and as the negativity of people's reactions shows, betraying someone in a game is a fairly ruthless thing to do. It is definitely the case that some players who engage in deception and betrayal can best be understood as griefers. In studying *EVE Online* players, I encountered transcripts of scams that did not end once the theft was over, but the scammers continued to provoke their victims, then sharing these transcripts with others who went on to celebrate just how upset the victim was.[5] But cases like these were exceptions, not the rule.

Part of my exploration of this assumption has been to uncover the motivations that players have for engaging in treacherous play. In chapter 2, I developed the case that *EVE Online* scammers are engaging in a game of social, player-versus-player combat, and pointed to evidence like their

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

treatment of inexperienced players as an indication that their motivations are contingent on scamming being a (cruel but) "fair" form of competition. In chapter 3, I drew on the results of a quantitative player motivations survey that indicates that motivations to engage in treacherous play are not correlated with the same motivations to grief other players. In *Survivor*, contestants are playing for the million-dollar prize, and in chapter 4 I discussed how the negative accusation of "unnecessary betrayal" that can cost someone this prize is in part an accusation of having other motives to betray, such as seeking power or domination, not just strategic advantage.

But another part of this exploration has been to acknowledge the similarities that do exist between treacherous play and griefing, both types of play that occur at someone else's expense. We have seen how being betrayed is clearly upsetting in the *EVE Online* victims who "never logged back in," the broken keyboards of *DayZ* players, and Sue's famous speech at the first Final Tribal Council. Here Jaakko Stenros's conceptualization of the griefer as an "entitled asshole" offered a richer understanding about what makes treacherous play feel like griefing, even if it falls within the rules and is motivated by game advantage. The treacherous *DayZ* player, whom we found in our player motivations survey to be less interested in the social game and more interested in competition and role play, is ignoring the social goals of other players. In seeking social dominance over their marks, *EVE Online* scammers who engage in "social PvP" are similarly transforming the social domain of the game into a play object. Both acts resemble the entitlement that Stenros describes as characterizing the griefer, who treats others as mere objects to be played with, rather than as equal opponents.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

This is not to argue that treacherous players are griefers but to suggest that unpacking the similarities helps us understand what makes player interactions in games either detrimental or enriching. The bar for toxicity online is just extraordinarily low. The PlayStation game *Journey* is widely applauded for the universal positivity of its player culture, only achieved by removing almost all possibility for player interaction and designing a game that affords no possible opportunity for another player to affect you in a negative way. We can see the consequences of this gatekeeping in who plays online games (overwhelmingly straight white males), the types of games that are made (which cater to this straight white male audience), and the subsequent values expressed by vicious hate groups like those mobilized under Gamergate.[6]

Against this point, though, it has been interesting to note the ways that treacherous play has worked to *enhance* the social experience of games for players whom the presence of treachery doesn't push out.[7] Part of the reason why *Survivor* players are so upset when they are betrayed is because—*to truly trust another player*—they develop such close relationships with other players. In *EVE*, the possibility of deception and betrayal ensures a more closely bonded community and forces friendships that transcend the game. The alliance I joined and studied had numerous physical meetups, with many members staying together in Reykjavik each year for the annual convention. When *EVE* was quiet, they would play other games (including *DayZ*) together, and chat rooms were always filled with talk about topics beyond *EVE*. When trust can be misplaced, it is not easily given, and as a result treacherous games create an environment in which relationships are deep and highly valued.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

These tensions reveal the uncertain place that social interactions have in games. Social interactions are at once a core part of why we play games, but also are separate from gameplay. By its very nature, treacherous play is a social way of playing a game, but in becoming a play object, these social interactions, the values we place on them, and how we experience them are transformed. Treacherous play gives us insight into how social interactions can be part of the play of a game rather than something wrapped around it that contributes to its appeal. This is perhaps most prominent in board games like *Diplomacy* and *Junta*, played with established groups. The presence of treacherous play means that players pay more attention to their social interactions, which become less superficial and more intense, and the gameplay itself becomes a social experience in a way that a cerebral game of chess does not. Treacherous play is not antisocial, but it does transform it.

Assumption 3: Treacherous Players Are Bad People

The third assumption is that players who play treacherously must be a specific kind of person, maybe someone whom you might not want to spend time with or trust with your bank details. This assumption is predicated on the suggestion that the way you behave in a game is indicative of who you are, reflective of a virtue approach to ethics that asks, "What kind of person would do this?"

Unpacking the way treachery is valued in *Survivor* showed that people definitely make this assumption. Players like Russell Hantz, who reached the end of two seasons in a row but did not win, were punished by a jury of players unwilling to reward him for his style of play, lest they reward a bad person. Here attribution theory helped us understand not just why

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

players were so upset about being betrayed but how the process of searching for a cause for failure might lead us to assume things about the character of the person who betrayed us.

Treacherous play seems to draw these assumptions in a way that other transgressive play does not because distinguishing between "game trust" and "real trust" is hard, meaning that distinguishing between the characteristics of "untrustworthy in the game" and "untrustworthy in real life" can likewise be difficult. In general, players are exceptionally adept at distinguishing between acts simulated in a game and their real-world counterparts. We know that killing in a game is not *real* killing, so we don't assume negative things about people who kill in games. The very nature of play in children and animals is predicated on their ability to quickly distinguish between, say, play fighting and real fighting. This aspect of treacherous play seems to imply an inherent, perhaps unresolvable, tension in distinguishing between "game trust" and "real trust" in a way that is not the case for other types of play.

This quality is tied into the centrality of choice to treacherous play; *EVE*, *DayZ*, and *Survivor* all afford players the responsibility to choose whether they are a treacherous player or a trustworthy one. Many games offer ethical role play, but rarely to this degree. Miguel Sicart notes *EVE* as an example of a game closest to ethical soundness for this reason; an *EVE* scammer is not simply following an unethical story laid out to play but is given the *choice* to be ethical, by the player's own determination.[8] This is the perspective that Hilmar has toward the ethics of scamming and espionage, arguing that "morality and ethics are things which are at play in *EVE* more so than any other game because we, the developer, have not taken a moral or ethical stance." Hilmar argues that *EVE Online* allows its players to "experiment with a player role you would not dare

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

even try in reality because everything about your own being is at stake," and giving players this opportunity is important, because "morality and ethics are some of the most powerful things in human society. . . . We have created a playground where these are some of the tools at play . . . and I think that this is a very powerful thing, because morality and ethics need to be played with, to be fully explored, otherwise no one can evolve."[9]

This is the very nature of ethics; we must decide for ourselves if our choices are right or wrong. Choosing is how we can be considered to be ethical at all. Indeed, in simply pondering the question of whether it is ethical to spy on an enemy alliance in *EVE Online*, you have become a little bit more ethical yourself. The overall argument that I am putting forward in this final chapter is that treacherous play—irrespective of whether it is ethical or unethical, within the rules or a form of griefing—shows the potential for play to give people the opportunity to explore aspects of themselves in bounded ways. As I showed in my discussion of *DayZ*, players do feel guilty when they kill another player in the game. Players recognize the shared desire not to die, and they grapple with the choice to kill. Morality and ethics are being played with, not ignored or suspended, thus affording an opportunity for moral growth. It is a strength of games as a medium that they can genuinely offer players the ability to explore the boundaries of our moral identity and how it feels to be bad.

Play Doesn't Have to Be Fun

I teach an undergraduate introduction to game studies at the University of Sydney, and I try to persuade my students not to use one word: *fun*. It is a mediocre stand-in for a much more

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

complex and interesting phenomenon that the word "fun" just doesn't capture.

Games and play are not always about just positive experiences, and players don't always want to be protected from harsh, painful, and unpleasant experiences. As I reported in chapter 3, over half the respondents to our survey of *DayZ* player experiences testified that they found the extremely unpleasant, high-consequence nature of death "very enjoyable," and many respondents who rated it as "not enjoyable at all" still nominated it as their favorite feature, "what makes [the game] exciting." As with horror movies and roller coasters, there is an appeal in experiencing the unpleasant in the relatively safe and bounded context of a game.

Where we can see the allure of frustrating and punishing, treacherous play also highlights the similar appeal to playing *bad* that games alone can satisfy. Irrespective of whether it is ethical or not, running a scam in *EVE Online* or betraying a companion in *DayZ* allows us to experience—momentarily, and in the same safe and bounded way—the experience of being bad. Ultimately these kinds of experiences also teach us what it means to be good.

Personally, I have never run a scam or spied on an enemy alliance in *EVE*. I have killed a few players in *DayZ*, but with bullets, not betrayal. Unfortunately, I haven't had the opportunity to play *Survivor* (yet . . .),[10] but the presence of treacherous play in these games contributes significantly to their appeal and success far beyond the positive experience players have when scamming victims, betraying collaborators, and voting out opponents. Treacherous play shows how complex and provocative playful experiences can really be.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Appendix

Here you will find the rules to *So Long Sucker*, the treacherous game designed in the 1950s by the game theorists Mel Hausner, John Forbes Nash, Lloyd Shapely, and Martin Shubik. Negotiation and agreements are key to winning *So Long Sucker*, but betrayal is also an implicit necessity. I provide the rules here in case you're tempted to evaluate the experience of playing treacherously for yourself. Caution is recommended before playing with spouses or coworkers.

"SO LONG SUCKER"—A FOUR-PERSON GAME

M. Hausner, J. Nash, L. Shapley, and M. Shubik

This parlor game has little structure and depends almost completely on the bargaining ability and the persuasiveness of the players. In order to win, it is necessary to enter into a series of temporary unenforceable conditions. This, however, is usually not sufficient; at some point it may be to the advantage of a player to renege on his agreement. The four authors still occasionally talk to each other.

First published in M. Hausner, J. Nash, L. Shapley, and M. Shubik, "'So Long Sucker'—a Four-Person Game," in *Game Theory and Related Approaches to Social Behavior*, ed. Martin Shubik (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), 359–361.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Rules

1. A four-person game.

2. Each player starts with 7 *chips* (playing cards, or other markers may be used instead), distinguishable by their color from the chips of any other player. As the game proceeds, players will gain possession of chips of other colors. The player must keep their holdings in view at all times. For a longer game, more chips may be used. If the game is attempted with more than four players, then the number of chips per player should be reduced.

3. The player to make the first move is decided by chance.

4. A *move* is made by placing a chip of any color out onto the playing area, or on top of any chip or pile of chips already in the playing area.

5. The *order of play*, except when a capture has just been made or a player has just been defeated (Rules 6 and 9), is decided by the last player to have moved. He may give the move to any player (including himself) whose color is not represented in the pile just played on. But if all players are represented in that pile, then he must give the move to the player whose most-recently-played chip is furthest down in the pile.

6. A *capture* is accomplished by playing two chips of the same color consecutively on one pile. The player designated by that color must kill one chip, of his choice, out of the pile, and then take in the rest. He then gets the next move.

7. A *kill* of a chip is effected by placing it in the "dead box."

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

8. A *prisoner* is a chip of a color other than that of the player who holds it. A player may at any time during the game kill any prisoner in his possession, or *transfer* it to another player. Such transfers are unconditional, and cannot be retracted. A player may not transfer chips of his own color, nor kill them, except out of a captured pile.

9. *Defeat* of a player takes place when he is given the move, and is unable to play through having no chips in his possession. However, his defeat is not final until every player holding prisoners has declared his refusal to come to the rescue by means of transfer (Rule 8). Upon defeat, a player withdraws from the game, and the move *rebounds* to the player who gave him the move. (If the latter is thereby defeated, the move goes to the player who gave *him* the move, etc.)

10. The chips of a defeated player remain in play as prisoners, but are ignored in determining the order of play (Rule 5). If a pile is captured by the chips of a defeated player, the entire pile is killed, and the move rebounds as in Rule 9.

11. The *winner* is the player surviving after all others have been defeated. Note that a player can win even if he holds no chips and even if all chips of his color have been killed.

12. *Coalitions*, or agreements to cooperate, are permitted, and may take any form. However, the rules provide no penalty for failure to live up to an agreement. Open discussion is not restricted, but players are not allowed to confer away from the table during the game, or make agreements before the start of the game.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Acknowledgments

This book originated in a range of collaborative projects I have been undertaking since 2012, and therefore I am deeply thankful of my numerous collaborators and coauthors, to whom I owe a great deal.

My studies into *EVE Online* have always been guided by the sage advice and wisdom of Martin Gibbs and Michael Arnold, whose contributions were instrumental in helping me establish the scholarliness of my interest in *EVE*. I remain indebted to Torill Elvira Mortensen, Jonas Linderoth, Ashley Brown, and the rest of the *Dark Play* crew for the incredible feedback and advice at their little workshop in Gothenburg. Acknowledgments are also owed to T. L. Taylor for making sure I met Kelly Bergstrom at DiGRA 2013, whose fascinating work on *EVE* helped me improve my own. To Kelly and the rest of the *EVE* scholars, particularly my coauthors Darryl Woodford, Chris Paul, Nick Webber, and Oskar Milik, it's a big (virtual) universe to study, and I'm glad I got to research it with you. Internet spaceships *are* serious business.

I'm also very lucky to have had an excellent graduate student, Fraser Allison, to whom I owe a sincere apology for distracting him from his PhD so often to write about *DayZ* with

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

me. Massive thanks are also owed to Dean Hall; without his incredible game and support of the research, I would not have been able to learn so much from all the players who gave their time to the research.

Tracing back even further, I owe a great deal to Vicki Compton, who introduced me to *Survivor* in 2008. I sincerely, and without reservation, admit I was wrong to have thought it was "just another reality TV show." Forty seasons later, I'm amazed you still put up with me constantly pausing each episode to critique each player's strategic decisions.

This book has benefited from substantial advice and mentorship from several generous colleagues. Thanks to Chris Paul (again!) for his feedback on the manuscript proposal; Mia Consalvo, my "ultimate peer reviewer"; the other Playful Thinking series editors; my anonymous reviewers; and Doug Sery at MIT Press for the constructive criticisms of the project and your support for the book. Thank you also to Nick Enfield and the Sydney Social Sciences and Humanities Advanced Research Centre for the support in finishing the book.

My research would not be possible without the support and contributions of the players; thanks for letting me take your play seriously and letting me into your worlds. Thanks to Endie for many added insights into the espionage involved in the Fountain War (who thought it was a good idea to try to study something people work very hard to keep hidden?) and to my fellow zombie-apocalypse survivors Andrew and Jake. Andrew, if you hadn't been so gullible, I'd be a whole chapter short.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Bergström, "Implicit Rules of Board Games."

2. Björk, "Fabricated Innocence."

3. Nasar, *A Beautiful Mind*, 102.

4. Poundstone, *Prisoner's Dilemma*, 260.

5. Stenros, "Guided by Transgression," 13.

6. Kretchmar, "Competition, Redemption and Hope."

7. Nguyen and Zagal, "Good Violence, Bad Violence."

8. Weimer, "Consent and Right Action in Sport."

9. Suits, *The Grasshopper*.

10. Nguyen and Zagal, "Good Violence, Bad Violence," 6.

11. Juul, *The Art of Failure*.

12. Apter, *Reversal Theory*; Zillmann, "Excitation Transfer."

13. An extensive and wide-ranging body of research examines the toxicity of online cultures and its consequences, with which the open and unmoderated treachery in games like *EVE Online* is closely entwined. For recent exemplary introductions to this area of work, see Shaw, *Gaming at the Edge*; Paul, *The Toxic Meritocracy of Videogames*;

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Gray, *Intersectional Tech*; Gray, Voorhees, and Vossen, *Feminism in Play*; Taylor and Voorhees, *Masculinities in Play*; and Harper, Adams, and Taylor, *Queerness in Play*. By toxic, I refer to the all too frequent occurrences of homophobia, sexism, racism, and ableism in online gaming spaces.

14. As a starting point for the breadth of research into the sociality and social appeal of MMOGs, see Chen, *Leet Noobs*; Taylor, *Play between Worlds*; Nardi, *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*; and Corneliussen and Rettberg, *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity*, an edited collection on *World of Warcraft*.

15. Foo and Koivisto, "Defining Grief Play in MMORPGs"; Consalvo, *Cheating*, 118.

16. Stenros identifies seven grief play rhetorics in "Playfulness, Play and Games," 185–188.

17. *Diplomacy* is a strategic board game created in 1954, set in Europe in the initial years of World War I. Unlike most board wargames, *Diplomacy* has long negotiation phases where players form alliances and make promises that they can renege on in the simultaneous movement phase, where players' secret orders are revealed and executed at once, similar to *Survivor*'s simultaneous vote. Writing in 2017 for *Lifehacker*, Haoran Un called *Diplomacy* "the most evil board game ever made."

18. *Werewolf* (a.k.a. *Mafia*) is a social deduction party game in which players are secretly assigned a role, either as a werewolf or as a villager. During the nighttime phase, the werewolves secretly collude to kill a villager, and in the daytime phase, the villagers, who are in the majority, respond by voting to eliminate a suspected werewolf. Gameplay requires werewolves to be deceptive about their role, so that the villagers eliminate other villagers rather than the werewolves. The game ends when either team is the only one left alive. Since players in *Werewolf* are assigned their roles, the game is not an example of treacherous play. Although a werewolf is being deceptive, like the impostor in *Among Us*, the werewolf has not made a choice about whom to betray and whom not to betray.

19. Sicart, *The Ethics of Computer Games*, 218.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

20. The prisoner's dilemma is a theory developed by Merrill Flood and Melvin Dresher in the 1950s that seeks to explain why two "rational" individuals might not cooperate, even if doing so is in their best interests. See Poundstone, *Prisoner's Dilemma*.

Chapter 2

1. This is a simplification, as pricing varies across territories, and it is possible to purchase a subscription using in-game funds. Free-to-play accounts were introduced in 2016, but they are limited to certain skills and ships. If you are an *EVE* player, I hope you will forgive the simplifications throughout this chapter. *EVE* is extraordinarily complicated.

2. Paul, "EVE Online Is Hard."

3. See Bergstrom, "Imagined Capsuleers" and "Everything I Know."

4. Goodfellow, "The Russians Are Coming!"

5. As there is a short delay before CONCORD ships arrive to destroy the unprovoked aggressor, it is possible to destroy a mining ship even in high-security space. While the aggressor will definitely be destroyed too, this can be a profitable play style, as a third player can loot the destroyed ships for profit. See Bergstrom, "Imagined Capsuleers," for more on this style of play.

6. "o7" is a common colloquialism in *EVE*, intended to mimic a person saluting.

7. This page goes on to note that "scams that affect areas outside of the game may not be tolerated in the same manner," going on to cite examples such as impersonating CCP or using technical exploits or hacks. See CCP Games, "Scams."

8. ISK stands for InterStellar Kredits, the in-game currency.

9. Warmelink, *Online Gaming and Playful Organization*.

10. Testament to the "realness" of these friendships, one Icelandic *EVE Online* player moved from Reykjavik to Cardigan, Wales, to live with and help run a bookshop that his friend—with whom he had

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

played *EVE* for nine years—had won in a raffle. See Smith, "How We Live Together."

11. Sicart argues that, in playing, we create a "player-self," a sub-identity that helps resolve the contradictions between our values in everyday life and our values when playing a game. Sicart, *The Ethics of Computer Games*.

12. Ceino, "One of the Biggest Scams."

13. See CCP Falcon, "An Announcement regarding Real Life Harassment."

14. Hilmar Veigar Pétursson, CEO of CCP Games, interview with author, April 16, 2019.

15. Pseudonyms used here for both players.

16. This use falls within the boundaries established by the developer, since it was contingent on misplaced trust rather than the use of a technical exploit or hacking their account.

17. This finding is echoed by Yasmin B. Kafai and Deborah Fields's research into the (very different) virtual-world game *Whyville*, an educational internet site geared toward children aged eight to fourteen and predominantly popular with young girls. One of the participants in their study, Zoe, engaged in scamming motivated by a desire to make more virtual currency, part of what Kafai and Fields describe as part of a process of being "recognized as an inside player." Kafai and Fields, *Connected Play*, 78–81. Among the many differences between *EVE Online* and *Whyville*, it is worth noting that scamming is against the rules in *Whyville* but still surprisingly pervasive; see Kafai, Fields, and Ellis, "Ethics of Play and Participation."

18. Klastrup, "What Makes *World of Warcraft*," 143.

19. Nguyen and Zagal, "Good Violence, Bad Violence," 12.

20. This is not to say that this precludes it from still being play. As Jaakko Stenros notes, one-sided play (like the social domination of an *EVE* scammer) is still play. Stenros, "Guided by Transgression."

21. This is a challenge in sandbox games like *EVE Online*, as perhaps more than in most other multiplayer games, it becomes difficult to

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

agree on what the "correct" set of unnecessary obstacles is in competitive play. I have previously referred to this challenge as the demarcation problem in multiplayer games (Carter, Gibbs, and Arnold, "Demarcation Problem in Multiplayer Games"), borrowing a theory from the sociology of science to understand how players construct play as being "acceptable" or "unacceptable" play. In another piece, I unpack the crucial role of scamming paratexts in this process; see Carter, "Massively Multiplayer Dark Play." Ashley Craft also uses this as a starting point to argue that since you can't *know* someone has consented to betrayal, theft in *EVE Online* is immoral. Craft, "Sin in Cyber-Eden."

22. Carter et al., "EVE Is Real."

23. Paul, "EVE Online Is Hard," 17.

24. Boudreau, "Beyond Fun."

25. Oskar Milik discusses the role of time and labor in this war in further detail in "The Digital Grind."

26. Sky, "'Gifted' Fountain Stations." In citing this article, it's worth noting that TheMittani.com was a GSF-run *EVE Online* news website, named after the leader of the GSF. Its reporting was part of the war itself; the site was a propaganda wing of the GSF.

27. I have written on propaganda in the Fountain War in Carter, "Emitexts and Paratexts."

28. Harrison, "The Accidental Spymaster."

29. Juul, *The Art of Failure*.

30. Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale, "Learned Helplessness in Humans."

31. Jørgensen, "When Is It Enough?"

32. Hilmar Veigar Pétursson interview, April 16, 2019.

33. We have written about this phrase elsewhere, and it also fits into the broader discourse in gaming culture that seeks to establish a hierarchy between games that are "real games" and those (typically more casual) ones that are not. Carter et al., "EVE Is Real."

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Chapter 3

1. See Carter and Allison, "Fear, Loss and Meaningful Play."

2. Lahti, "*DayZ* Interview."

3. Following the popularity of the mod, a stand-alone version of *DayZ* was released in "early access" in December 2013, but this version was critiqued as being incomplete and featuring many bugs and gameplay issues. A "full" version was not released until December 2018, just shy of five years later, with the game ultimately eclipsed by newer titles in the genre. At time of publication, *DayZ* has sold over four million copies, but—according to the website SteamCharts—averages fewer than five thousand concurrent players.

4. Jaakko Stenros identifies seven grief play rhetorics in "Playfulness, Play and Games," 185–188.

5. With this, I refer to the way that griefing and trolling online often work—via their use of racist, sexist, and homophobic language—to exclude certain demographics from online games, perpetuating toxic culture. See Boudreau, "Beyond Fun."

6. Stenros, "Playfulness, Play and Games," 188–190.

7. Yee, "Motivations for Play in Online Games."

8. Nick Yee continues to host the useful Daedalus Project website, which covers this work comprehensively. http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus.

9. Out of 1,704 respondents, only 22 identified as female (1.2 percent), and 2 identified as transgender. This gender ratio is the most uneven of which we are aware for an online survey of game players, which more typically see female participation in the 20–40 percent range. We speculate that the widespread use of proximity voice communication in *DayZ* may expose female players to a greater-than-usual risk of gendered harassment, leading to lower female participation in the virtual world—particularly in the context of the game's established culture of simulated violent coercion as a form of play. We base this theory in part on comments from two of the female

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

respondents who described incidents in which they had received gendered abuse from male players. In addition, a small number of male respondents expressed or described aggressively sexist and homophobic behavior between players.

10. We did not find the mechanics, customization, escapism, and relationships player motivations. Their absence makes sense, as these ways of playing are not afforded by *DayZ* in the same way they are in a MMORPG.

11. Stenros, "Playfulness, Play and Games," 192–195.

12. The theory of flow was originally developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. It is often applied to understanding the appeal of digital games, via Jenova Chen, "Flow in Games."

13. Apter, *Reversal Theory*. For a useful discussion of Apter, see Stenros, "Playfulness, Play and Games," 67–68.

14. Hume, "Of Tragedy," 185.

15. Hume, "Of Tragedy," 132.

16. Zillmann, "Excitation Transfer."

17. Brendan Keogh, "When Game Over Means Game Over," 2.

18. Legarie, "Top 10 Scariest Games."

19. Notably, studies indicate that inexperienced players, who presumably have a less developed sense of the unreality and abstraction of in-game actions, experience more genuine distress after perpetrating violence in games. See Hartmann and Vorderer, "It's Okay to Shoot a Character"; and Gollwitzer and Melzer, "Macbeth and the Joystick."

20. Jørgensen and Karlsen, *Transgression in Games and Play*.

21. Klimmt et al., "How Players Manage Moral Concerns." See also subsequent work by Tilo Hartmann in "Moral Disengagement in Violent Videogames"; Hartmann, Toz, and Brandon, "Just a Game?";

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Hartmann and Vorderer, "It's Okay to Shoot a Character"; Gollwitzer and Melzer, "Macbeth and the Joystick."

22. Bandura, "Selective Moral Disengagement."

23. Carter and Allison, "Guilt in DayZ."

24. Plunkett, "Secret behind the Success."

25. Julia Bopp has similarly studied the way that emotionally challenging experiences can be attractive to players, bolstering our knowledge of how negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and fear can be part of the appeal of games. See Bopp, "Aesthetic Emotions in Digital Games"; and Bopp, Mekler, and Opwis, "Negative Emotion, Positive Experience?" and "An Odd Kind of Pleasure."

26. Suits, *The Grasshopper*.

27. Salen and Zimmerman, *Rules of Play*.

28. Hilmar Veigar Pétursson interview, April 16, 2019.

29. For short periods during the mod version of the game, and later in the stand-alone (but after I collected my data), *DayZ* introduced a "humanity" points system that did introduce a connection between each life. The feature was controversial, with many critics saying it dampened the role-play potential of the game.

Chapter 4

1. Crew, "Viewer Interpretations of Reality Television."

2. However, this is not always the case. One respondent to the *DayZ* survey described how he spent hours hunting down a group of players who had betrayed him, pretending to be a friendly survivor to get close enough to kill them with a grenade. Several stories have circulated online about *EVE Online* players using scamming or espionage against a player who had previously betrayed them, in some cases playing pivotal roles in the game's wars.

3. I have analyzed how play is valued in *Survivor* Final Tribal Councils in greater depth in "Valuing Play in *Survivor*."

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

4. Although not specifically on *Survivor*, but on other "in-the-wild" *Survivor*-style television shows like *Survivorman*, see Champion, "Survivor Shows and Caveman Masculinity."

5. See Gabrielle Wall, "Outwit, Outplay, Outcast?"

6. Lindstrom, "*Survivor Vanuatu*: Myths of Matriarchy Revisited."

7. Drew, "Pretending to Be 'Postracial.'"

8. Giannetti and Sagarese, "Why You Shouldn't."

9. The practices of *Survivor* fans online are one of the key case studies in Henry Jenkins's classic *Convergence Culture*.

10. Podlas, "Primetime Crimes."

11. Podlas, "Primetime Crimes," 172.

12. Is this all that different from studying a game as complex as *EVE Online*, though? Very little of what goes on in *EVE* is transparent to the scholar studying it; an account must be constructed through interviews with players, in-depth play of the game, and the close interrogation of what is made visible. Competing accounts can emerge through this process. From the standpoint of a social constructionist epistemology—a theory of knowledge and what can be known—researchers can never access the original experience.

13. Jeff Probst, *Survivor: Heroes vs. Villains* (2009) reunion.

14. This critique of the show is now discussed openly during tribal councils, also applied to *EVE Online* by Kelly Bergstrom in "Imagined Capsuleers."

15. I use the framing of positive and negative valuation here, rather than boundaries of play, because I believe it better captures the way that play is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated in a hierarchy, rather than within clearly established or definable boundaries. See Carter, "Valuing Play in Survivor."

16. Brooks, "Is Betrayal in EVE Online Unethical?"

17. Sicart, *The Ethics of Computer Games*.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

18. Yet, in another interview, he argued, "If my own kids played this, I'd say, 'Hey, I need you to lie, cheat, and steal your way to the end of that game. Do whatever it takes, claw your way to the end, it doesn't matter. But don't quit.'"

Chapter 5

1. Björk and Holopainen, *Patterns in Game Design*.

2. Wadley, Carter, and Gibbs, "Voice in Virtual Worlds."

3. A recent example of such harassment occurred in *Fallout 76*, an online open-world version of the popular *Fallout* games published by Bethesda. Almost immediately after launch, players reported being hunted down by homophobic players, and the developers had provided no way of reporting the players in game. See Good, "*Fallout 76* Players Permabanned."

4. Certain ships cannot even be traded on the game market (they are "too big"), leading to the emergence of players like Chribba—the only trusted *EVE Online* player—who provide an escrow service for these transactions. Chribba wrote about his experiences in "The Art of Selling Trust."

5. A rare exception to this among AAA titles is *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* (2002), where you can kill main quest characters and thus be unable to complete the game.

6. Some seasons (such as S22 *Redemption Island* or S38 *Edge of Extinction*) offer paths back into the game, but typically this is not an option.

7. Skill points in *EVE* are earned in real time, rather than in exchange for in-game actions, as is the case in other MMOGs. Older accounts have an unassailable advantage over new ones. If you die without having "backed up" your skill points (refreshing your clone), you can lose thousands of skill points equal to days or weeks of real time that cannot be recovered.

8. See Jørgensen, *Gameworld Interfaces*; Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds*; Björk and Holopainen, *Patterns in Game Design*, 56–57; Klastrup, "The Worldness of *EverQuest*."

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

9. Krzywinska, "World Creation and Lore."

10. Carter, Gibbs, and Arnold, "Demarcation Problem in Multiplayer Games."

11. See CCP Games, "Scams."

12. To give an example, on *Survivor: Pearl Islands*, the player Jonny Fairplay instructed his friend to lie during the family visit challenge and say that his grandmother had died. This ensured Johnny was chosen to join the winner of the challenge on the reward, giving him much-needed food and a chance to strategize with the other players about the reward.

Chapter 6

1. For instance, in the context of long-term *EVE Online* scams involving manipulated friendships, Ian Brooks argues that "a good person would not betray people for fun." Brooks, "Is Betrayal in EVE Online Unethical?," 5.

2. Nguyen and Zagal, "Good Violence, Bad Violence."

3. Paul, "EVE Online Is Hard."

4. Hilmar Veigar Pétursson interview, April 16, 2019.

5. A particularly egregious example is the "bonus room" controversy, first reported in *EVE News24* (see Teg, "Jester's Trek"), which was widely condemned by *EVE*'s player community. In this case, an *EVE Online* scammer would subject victims to escalating emotional abuse in a private voice chat server. In response, CCP Games permanently banned the player, citing existing policy against real-life harassment.

6. Two recent articles that provide thorough overviews and an excellent introduction to this space are Chess and Shaw, "A Conspiracy of Fishes"; and Mortensen, "Anger, Fear, and Games." For a broader look at the conflicts that have emerged in the context of the diversification of video game culture, see Golding and Van Deventer, *Game Changers*.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

7. In chapter 2, I noted that as few as 3 percent of *EVE Online* players are women, and of the 1,704 respondents to our *DayZ* player motivations survey, only 1.2 percent did not identify as male. That being said, scamming is not limited to these games and this type of player community. Research by Yasmin B. Kafai and Deborah Fields into *Whyville*, a virtual world game mostly popular with girls between the ages of eight and sixteen, found scamming to be pervasive. See Kafai and Fields, *Connected Play*; and Kafai, Fields, and Ellis, "Ethics of Play and Participation."

8. Sicart, *The Ethics of Computer Games*.

9. Hilmar Veigar Pétursson interview, April 16 2019.

10. Jeff Probst, if you're reading this, give me a call.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Bibliography

Abramson, L. Y., M. E. Seligman, and J. D. Teasdale. "Learned Helplessness in Humans: Critique and Reflection." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 87, no. 1 (1978): 49–74.

Apter, Michael. *Reversal Theory*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2007.

Bandura, Albert. "Selective Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency." *Journal of Moral Education* 31, no. 2 (2002): 101–119.

Bergström, Karl. "The Implicit Rules of Board Games: On the Particulars of the Lusory Agreement." In *Proceedings of the 14th International Academic MindTrek Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environments*, 86–93. New York: ACM Press, 2010.

Bergstrom, Kelly. "Constructing the Ideal EVE Online Player." In *Proceedings of the 2013 DiGRA Conference*. Atlanta, GA: DiGRA, 2013.

Bergstrom, Kelly. "Everything I Know about This Game Suggests I Should Avoid It at All Costs: Non-player Perceptions about EVE Online." In *Diversifying Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Race and Gender in Gaming*, edited by Gabriela Richard, Brendesha M. Tynes, and Yasmin B. Kafai, 118–132. Pittsburgh, PA: ETC Press, 2016.

Bergstrom, Kelly. "Imagined Capsuleers: Reframing Discussions about Gender and EVE Online." In *Internet Spaceships Are Serious Business: An EVE Online Reader*, edited by Marcus Carter, Kelly Bergstrom, and Darryl Woodford, 148–163. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Björk, Staffan. "Fabricated Innocence." In *The Dark Side of Game Play: Controversial Issues in Playful Environments*, edited by Torill Mortensen, Jonas Linderoth, and Ashley Brown, 171–190. London: Routledge, 2015.

Björk, Staffan, and Jussi Holopainen. *Patterns in Game Design*. Hingham, MA: Charles River Media, 2005.

Bohnet, Iris, and Richard Zeckhauser. "Trust, Risk and Betrayal." *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 55, no. 4 (2004): 467–475.

Bopp, Julia. "Aesthetic Emotions in Digital Games: The Appeal of Moving, Challenging and Thought-Provoking Player Experiences." PhD thesis, Aalto University, 2020.

Bopp, Julia, Elisa Mekler, and Klaus Opwis. "Negative Emotion, Positive Experience? Emotionally Moving Moments in Digital Games." In *CHI '16: Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 2996–3006. New York: ACM Press, 2016.

Bopp, Julia, Klaus Opwis, and Elisa Mekler. "'An Odd Kind of Pleasure': Differentiating Emotional Challenge in Digital Games." In *CHI '18: Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, paper 41. New York: ACM Press, 2018.

Boudreau, Kelly. "Beyond Fun: Transgressive Gameplay—Toxic and Problematic Player Behavior as Boundary Keeping." In *Transgression in Games and Play*, edited by Kristine Jørgensen and Faltin Karlsen, 257–272. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019.

Brooks, Ian. "Is Betrayal in EVE Online Unethical?" *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research* 10, no. 3 (2017): article 4.

Carter, Marcus. "Emitexts and Paratexts: Propaganda in EVE Online." *Games and Culture* 10, no. 4 (2014): 311–342.

Carter, Marcus. "Massively Multiplayer Dark Play." In *The Dark Side of Game Play: Controversial Issues in Playful Environments*, edited by Torill Mortensen, Jonas Linderoth, and Ashley Brown, 191–209. London: Routledge, 2015.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Carter, Marcus. "Valuing Play in *Survivor*: A Constructionist Approach to Multiplayer Games." *Games and Culture* 15, no. 4 (2020): 434–452.

Carter, Marcus, and Fraser Allison. "Fear, Loss and Meaningful Play: Permadeath in DayZ." *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds* 9, no. 2 (2017): 143–158.

Carter, Marcus, and Fraser Allison. "Guilt in DayZ." In *Transgression in Games and Play*, edited by Kristine Jørgensen and Faltin Karlsen, 133–152. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019.

Carter, Marcus, Kelly Bergstrom, Nick Webber, and Oskar Milik. "EVE Is Real: How Conceptions of the 'Real' Affect and Reflect an Online Game Community." *Well-Played* 5, no. 2 (2016).

Carter, Marcus, Kelly Bergstrom, and Darryl Woodford, eds. *Internet Spaceships Are Serious Business: An EVE Online Reader*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Carter, Marcus, Martin Gibbs, and Michael Arnold. "The Demarcation Problem in Multiplayer Games: Boundary-Work in EVE Online's eSport." *Game Studies* 15, no. 1 (2015).

CCP Falcon. "An Announcement regarding Real Life Harassment." *EVE* Forums, last modified March 28, 2014. https://forums-archive.eveonline.com/message/4405694.

CCP Games. "Scams." *EVE Online* Help Center. Last modified March 5, 2019. https://support.eveonline.com/hc/en-us/articles/203218892-Scams.

Ceino, Dou. "One of the Biggest Scams in Eve History." *EVE News24*, August 12, 2011. http://archive.evenews24.com/2011/08/12/one-of-the-biggest-scam-in-eve-history-ponzi-scheme-empties-over-1-trillion-isk-from-players-wallets.

Champion, Jared. "Survivor Shows and Caveman Masculinity." *Popular Culture Studies Journal* 4, nos. 1–2 (2016): 240–258.

Chen, Jenova. "Flow in Games (and Everything Else)." *Communications of the ACM* 50, no. 4 (2007): 31–34.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Chen, Mark. *Leet Noobs: The Life and Death of an Expert Player Group in World of Warcraft*. New York: Peter Lang, 2012.

Chess, Shira, and Adrienne Shaw. "A Conspiracy of Fishes, or How We Learned to Stop Worrying about #GamerGate and Embrace Hegemonic Masculinity." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 59, no. 1 (2015): 208–220.

Chribba. "The Art of Selling Trust." In *Internet Spaceships Are Serious Business: An EVE Online Reader*, edited by Marcus Carter, Kelly Bergstrom, and Darryl Woodford, 77–92. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Connell, Richard. *The Most Dangerous Game*. New York: Collier's, 1924.

Consalvo, Mia. *Cheating*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.

Corneliussen, Hilde G., and Jill Walker Rettberg, eds. *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity*: *A World of Warcraft Reader*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

Craft, Ashley. "Sin in Cyber-Eden: Understanding the Metaphysics and Morals of Virtual Worlds." *Ethics and Information Technology* 9, no. 3 (2007): 205–217.

Crew, Richard. "Viewer Interpretations of Reality Television: How Real Is *Survivor* for Its Viewers?" In *How Real Is Reality TV?*, edited by D. Escoffery, 61–78. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper and Row, 1990.

Drew, Emily. "Pretending to Be 'Postracial': The Spectacularization of Race in Reality TV's *Survivor*." *Television and New Media* 12, no. 4 (2011): 326–346.

Foo, Chek Yang, and Elina Koivisto. "Defining Grief Play in MMORPGs: Player and Developer Perceptions." In *ACE '04: Proceedings of the 2004 ACM SIGCHI International Conference on Advances in Computer Entertainment Technology*, 245–250. New York: ACM Press, 2014.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Giannetti, Charlene C., and Margaret Sagarese. "Why You Shouldn't Let Your Children Watch 'Survivor.'" *LA Times*, February 12, 2001. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-feb-12-ca-24252-story.html.

Golding, Daniel, and Leena Van Deventer. *Game Changers: From Minecraft to Misogyny, the Fight for the Future of Videogames*. Melbourne, Australia: Affirm Press, 2016.

Gollwitzer, Mario, and André Melzer. "Macbeth and the Joystick: Evidence for Moral Cleansing after Playing a Violent Videogame." *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 48, no. 6 (2012): 1356–1360.

Good, Owen. "*Fallout 76* Players Permabanned for Anti-gay Harassment." *Polygon*, November 30, 2018. https://www.polygon.com/2018/11/30/18120237/fallout-76-permanent-ban-homophobic-slur-video.

Goodfellow, Cat. "The Russians Are Coming! Stereotypes and Perceptions of 'Russianness' in EVE Online." In *Internet Spaceships Are Serious Business: An EVE Online Reader*, edited by Marcus Carter, Kelly Bergstrom, and Darryl Woodford, 77–92. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Gray, Kishonna. *Intersectional Tech: Black Users in Digital Gaming*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2020.

Gray, Kishonna, Gerald Voorhees, and Emma Vossen. *Feminism in Play*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Groen, Andrew. *Empires of EVE: A History of the Great Wars of EVE Online*. Seattle, WA: Lightburn Industries, 2016.

Harper, Todd, Meghan Blythe Adams, and Nicholas Taylor. *Queerness in Play*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Harrison, Keith. "The Accidental Spymaster." In *Internet Spaceships Are Serious Business: An EVE Online Reader*, edited by Marcus Carter, Kelly Bergstrom, and Darryl Woodford, 115–121. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Hartmann, Tilo. "The 'Moral Disengagement in Violent Videogames' Model." *Game Studies* 17, no. 2 (2017).

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Hartmann, Tilo, Erhan Toz, and Marvin Brandon. "Just a Game? Unjustified Virtual Violence Produces Guilt in Empathetic Players." *Media Psychology* 13, no. 4 (2010): 339–363.

Hartmann, Tilo, and Peter Vorderer. "It's Okay to Shoot a Character: Moral Disengagement in Violent Videogames." *Journal of Communication* 60 (2010): 94–119.

Hume, David. "Of Tragedy." In *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*. London: Millar, 1758.

Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture*. New York: NYU Press, 2006.

Jorgensen, Danny. *Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies*. London: SAGE Publications, 1989.

Jørgensen, Kristine. *Gameworld Interfaces*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013.

Jørgensen, Kristine. "When Is It Enough? Uncomfortable Game Content and the Transgression of Player Taste." In *Transgression in Games and Play*, edited by Kristine Jørgensen and Faltin Karlsen, 153–167 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019).

Jørgensen, Kristine, and Faltin Karlsen. *Transgression in Games and Play*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019.

Juul, Jesper. *The Art of Failure*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013.

Kafai, Yasmin B., and Deborah Fields. *Connected Play: Tweens in a Virtual World*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013.

Kafai, Yasmin B., Deborah Fields, and Estee Ellis. "The Ethics of Play and Participation in a Tween Virtual World: Continuity and Change in Cheating Practices and Perspectives in the Whyville Community." *Cognitive Development* 49, no. 1 (2019): 33–42.

Keogh, Brendan. "When Game Over Means Game Over: Using Permanent Death to Craft Living Stories in Minecraft." In *Proceedings of the 9th Australasian Conference on Interactive Entertainment*, article 20. New York: ACM Press, 2013.

Klastrup, Lisbeth. "What Makes *World of Warcraft* a World? A Note on Death and Dying." In *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World*

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

of Warcraft Reader, edited by Hilde Corneliussen and Jill Walker Rettberg, 143–166. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

Klastrup, Lisbeth. "The Worldness of *EverQuest*: Exploring a 21st Century Fiction." *Game Studies* 9, no. 1 (2009).

Klimmt, Christoph, Hannah Schmid, Andreas Nosper, Tilo Hartmann, and Peter Vorderer. "How Players Manage Moral Concerns to Make Video Game Violence Enjoyable." *Communications* 31 (2006): 309–328.

Kretchmar, Scott. "Competition, Redemption and Hope." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 39, no. 1 (2012): 277–287.

Krzywinska, Tanya. "World Creation and Lore: *World of Warcraft* as Rich Text." In *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader*, edited by Hilde Corneliussen and Jill Walker Rettberg, 123–142. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

Lahti, Evan. "*DayZ* Interview—How Zombies + Arma 2 Created Gaming's Best Story Machine." *PC Gamer*, May 16, 2012. https://www.pcgamer.com/day-z-interview-how-zombies-arma-2-created-gamings-best-story-machine.

Legarie, Dustin. "Top 10 Scariest Games." IGN.com, July 29, 2016. http://au.ign.com/articles/2016/07/29/top-10-scariest-games.

Lindstrom, Lamont. "*Survivor Vanuatu*: Myths of Matriarchy Revisited." *Contemporary Pacific* 19, no. 1 (2007): 162–174.

Milik, Oskar. "The Digital Grind: Time and Labor as Resources of War in EVE Online." In *Internet Spaceships Are Serious Business: An EVE Online Reader*, edited by Marcus Carter, Kelly Bergstrom, and Darryl Woodford, 55–76. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Mortensen, Torill Elvira. "Anger, Fear, and Games: The Long Event of #GamerGate." *Games and Culture* 13, no. 8 (2018): 787–806.

Nardi, Bonnie. *My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.

Nasar, Sylvia. *A Beautiful Mind*. London: Faber, 1998.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Nguyen, C. Thi, and José Zagal. "Good Violence, Bad Violence: The Ethics of Competition in Multiplayer Games." In *Proceedings of the 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG*. Abertay, Scotland: DiGRA, 2015.

Paul, Chris. "EVE Online Is Hard and It Matters." In *Internet Spaceships Are Serious Business: An EVE Online Reader*, edited by Marcus Carter, Kelly Bergstrom, and Darryl Woodford, 17–30. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Paul, Chris. *The Toxic Meritocracy of Videogames*: *Why Gaming Culture Is the Worst*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Plunkett, Luke. "The Secret behind the Success of *DayZ*, the Most Interesting PC 'Game' of 2012." *Kotaku*, May 24, 2012.

Podlas, Kimberlianne. "Primetime Crimes: Are Reality Television Programs 'Illegal Contests' in Violation of Federal Law." *Cardozo Arts and Entertainment* 25 (2007): 141–172.

Poundstone, William. *Prisoner's Dilemma*. New York: Anchor Books, 1992.

Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004.

Shaw, Adrienne. *Gaming at the Edge*: *Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Sicart, Miguel. *The Ethics of Computer Games*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.

Sky, Marlona. "'Gifted' Fountain Stations Now under TEST Control." *The Mittani*, July 1, 2013. http://themittani.com/news/gifted-fountain-stations-now-under-test-control.

Smith, Gwendolyn. "How We Live Together: The Gamers Who Met Online." *The Guardian*, February 16, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/feb/16/how-we-live-together-met-through-online-gaming.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Stenros, Jaakko. "Guided by Transgression: Defying Norms as an Integral Part of Play." In *Transgression in Games and Play*, edited by Kristine Jørgensen and Faltin Karlsen, 13–26. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019.

Stenros, Jaakko. "Playfulness, Play and Games: A Constructionist Ludology Approach." PhD thesis, University of Tampere, 2015.

Suits, Bernard. *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2005.

Taylor, Nicholas, and Gerald Voorhees. *Masculinities in Play*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Taylor, T. L. *Play between Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.

Teg, Ripard. "Jester's Trek: The Bonus Round." *EN24*, March 25, 2014. http://evenews24.com/2014/03/25/jesters-trek-the-bonus-round.

Wadley, Greg, Marcus Carter, and Martin Gibbs. "Voice in Virtual Worlds: The Design, Use and Influence of Voice Chat in Online Play." *Human-Computer Interaction* 30, nos. 3–4 (2015): 336–365.

Wall, Gabrielle. "Outwit, Outplay, Outcast? Sex Discrimination in Voting Behaviour in the Reality Television Show *Survivor*." *New Zealand Economic Papers* 45, nos. 1–2 (2011): 183–193.

Warmelink, Harald. *Online Gaming and Playful Organization*. London: Routledge, 2014.

Weimer, Steven. "Consent and Right Action in Sport." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 39, no. 1 (2012): 11–31.

Wolf, Mark. *Building Imaginary Worlds*. London: Routledge, 2012.

Woods, Stewart. *Eurogames*. London: McFarland, 2012.

Yee, Nick. "Motivations for Play in Online Games." *Cyberpsychology and Behavior* 9, no. 6 (2006): 772–775.

Zillmann, Dolf. "Excitation Transfer in Communication-Mediated Aggressive Behavior." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 7, no. 4 (2017): 419–434.

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Index

Abramson, Lyn, 36, 80
Acceptability limits, 95–96
Allison, Fraser, 53
Ambiguous relationships
  between players, 88–89
Among Us, 9, 89, 114n18
Anderson, Benedict, 18
Antisociality, 6–8, 99–102
Apter, Michael J., 6, 51, 55, 98
Arousal, 51–52
Assumptions about treacherous
  play, 10, 97
  antisocial, 6–8, 99–102
  players are bad people, 8–10,
    102–104
  unethical, 3–6, 97–99, 123n1
Attribution theory, 36–37
  Survivor application, 80–81, 83–
    84, 102–103

Bandura, Albert, 54
Bergstrom, Kelly, 121n14
Betrayal. See also *EVE Online*
  scams
  affective responses, 5
  DayZ, 5, 7, 49, 59–61, 93
  enjoyment of, 37–38, 98–99
  ethics of, 5, 76
  EVE Online, 32–36, 38, 60, 86,
    93–94
  expectation of, 5, 93
  games designed for, 1
  vs. griefing, 11
  player choice, 9–11, 89
  So Long Sucker, 1–2
  Survivor, 2–3, 7, 67, 70–78, 94,
    100
Betrayal aversion theory, 5–6,
  72, 77
Björk, Staffan, 1, 70
Bohnet, Iris, 5, 77
Bopp, Julia, 120n25
Boudreau, Kelly, 30
Brooks, Ian, 20, 76, 83, 123n1

Cheating, 11
Choice
  role in ethics, 10, 104
  in *Survivor* treacherous play,
    78–79
  treacherous play as, 9–11, 89,
    103

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Consequential play, 65, 91–93, 122nn5–7. *See also* Death in games; Risk
Crew, Richard, 64
Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, 119n12

DayZ, 41–43, 118n3. See also *DayZ* death; *DayZ* treacherous play
  ambiguous player relationships, 88
  betrayal, 5, 7, 49, 59–61, 93
  consequential play, 92–93
  dystopian imaginary, 95
  ethical play, 49, 55–56, 59, 61
  glitches, 57–58
  griefing, 100
  "humanity" system, 120n29
  kidnapping play, 46–49
  killing, 53–56, 104
  limits on acceptability, 96
  meaningful play, 56–57
  open communication, 90
  player surveys, 44–46, 50, 53, 57–58, 60, 118n9, 119n10
  player types, 46–49
  trust, 91, 96
  voice chat, proximity-based, 42–43, 47, 118n9
DayZ death
  bad vs. good, 56–61
  betrayal improving, 93
  consequences, 41, 48–53, 92
  enjoyability, 50–53, 105
DayZ treacherous play
  acceptance of, 43–44
  consequences, 65, 120n2
  examples, 2, 41
  motivations for, 43–49, 100
  successful, 87
Death in games, 27, 41–42, 52, 56. See also *DayZ* death
Deception, 9, 29. See also *EVE Online* scams; Trust
Demarcation problem, 116–117n21
Designing treacherous play, 87–96
Design patterns
  ambiguous relationships between players, 88–89
  consequential play, 91–93, 122nn5–7
  dystopian imaginaries, 94–95
  limits on acceptability, 95–96
  open communication, 89–90
  treachery within the rules, 93–94
  trust requirements, 90–91
Diplomacy, 8, 114n17
Dishonesty. *See* Deception
Dresher, Melvin, 115n20
Dystopian imaginaries, 94–95

Ethics
  betrayal, 5, 76
  choice as necessary component of, 10, 104
  of competitive games, 3–4, 27–29, 55, 97
  DayZ, 49, 55–56, 59, 61

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

EVE Online, 10, 20, 27–31, 98, 103–104, 123n1
Survivor, 76–77, 82, 84, 98
treacherous play as unethical, 3–6, 97–99, 123n1
EVE Online, 15–16. See also *EVE Online* scams; Pétursson, Hilmar Veigar
alliances and wars, 17, 32–35
ambiguous player relationships, 88–89
betrayal appeal, 36–39
betrayal expectations, 93–94
consequential play, 65, 92, 120n2, 122n7
corporations (social groups), 17–20, 32–35
culture, 29–30, 38, 98
currency, 115n8
demographics, 29, 124n7
dystopian imaginary, 95
Endie, 35
espionage (betrayal), 32–36, 87, 103
ethics, 10, 20, 27–31, 98, 103–104
Fountain War, 32–35, 117n26
Goonswarm Federation (GSF), 32–33
griefing, 99–100, 123n5
identity verification systems, 18
limits on acceptability, 95–96
new players, 29–30
open communication, 90
player freedom, 22
player-vs.-player, 115n5
pricing, 15, 115n1
reality rhetoric, 38–39, 98
real relationships, 7, 20, 38–39, 101, 115n10
scammers, 26
shared player accounts, 19–20
ship combat, 27–28
stakes, 27
TEST Alliance Please Ignore, 32–33
transparency, 121n12
treacherous play examples, 3
trust, 5, 31, 38, 60, 91, 96, 122n4
universe of, 16–19
unnecessary obstacles, 29, 36, 116n21
EVE Online scams, 19
appeal of conducting, 26, 37, 87
developer perspectives, 22, 28
encouragement, 18–19
ethics, 20, 27–31, 103, 123n1
financial, 20–22
friendship betrayals, 19–20
limits, 115n7
motivations, 7, 25–26, 99–100
new players, 30
recruitment, 24–25
rules, 93–94
as social competition, 24, 26–28, 31
as style of play, 23–24
victim responses, 25, 30
Excitation transfer effect, 6, 51–52

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Failure, 6, 36. *See also* Attribution theory
Feel-bad games, 1, 70. See also *So Long Sucker*
Fields, Deborah, 116n17, 124n7
Flood, Merrill, 115n20
Flow theory, 50, 119n12
Fortnite, 4, 42
Fun, 104–105

Gage, Zach, 92
Gender
  DayZ players, 118n9, 124n7
  EVE Online players, 29, 124n7
  massively multiplayer online game players, 15
  Survivor play styles, 73, 121n14
Griefing, 7, 43
  vs. betrayal, 11
  EVE Online, 99–100, 123n5
  exclusionary effects, 118n5
  exploiting trust, 99
  vs. treacherous play, 7, 55–56, 100–101

Hantz, Russel, 71–75, 81, 84, 102, 122n18
Harassment, 90, 122n3
Hausner, Mel, 1
Hilmar. *See* Pétursson, Hilmar Veigar
Hume, David, 51

Imagined communities, 18

Jenkins, Henry, 121n9
Jørgensen, Kristine, 38, 53
Journey, 101
Juul, Jesper, 6, 36

Kafai, Yasmin B., 116n17, 124n7
Karlsen, Faltin, 53
Keogh, Brendan, 52
Klastrup, Lisbeth, 27

Lacina, Sarah, 78, 82–84
Lose/Lose, 92
Lusory goals, 4–5, 38, 55, 94, 97–98

Mafia, 114n18
Massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs), 15. See also *EVE Online; World of Warcraft*
Meaningful play, 56–57
Mere violence, 4–6, 55, 59
Moral disengagement, 53–54
Moral interpretation, 9–10, 54–55
Morality negotiation, 10
Motivations for playing treacherously, 43–49

Nash, John Forbes, 1–2
Negative experiences
  appeal of, 50–53
  good vs. bad, 38–39
  players seeking, 6
Nguyen, C. Thi, 3–4, 27–29, 55, 97

Online toxicity and hate, 101
Open communication, 89–90

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Paratelic mindsets, 51, 55
Parsons, Charlie, 63
Paul, Chris, 30
Pétursson, Hilmar Veigar (*EVE Online*)
  betrayal and trust, 38, 60
  ethics, 28, 98, 103–104
  scamming, 22, 28
  treacherous play limits, 35, 96
Play. *See also* Play styles vs. real-life identities
  consequential, 65, 91–93, 122nn5–7
  meaningful, 56–57
  as moral interpretation, 9–10, 54
Player motivations research, 44–46
Player relationships, ambiguous, 88–89
Player-selves, 20, 83, 116n11
Play styles vs. real-life identities
  assumptions about, 8–10, 102–104
  Survivor, 79–85, 102–103
Podlas, Kimberlianne, 69
Prisoner's dilemma, 12, 115n20
Probst, Jeff, 66, 71, 73, 95

Quiz shows, 68

Real life. *See* Play styles vs. real-life identities
Real relationships. *See also* Trust
  betrayal tensions, 83
  EVE Online, 7, 20, 38–39, 101, 115n10
  Survivor, 82–83, 101
Reversal theory, 6, 51, 55, 98
Risk, 38, 50–51, 59. *See also* Consequential play

Salen, Katie, 56
Scams, 7, 116n17, 124n7. See also *EVE Online* scams
Shapely, Lloyd, 1
Shubik, Martin, 1–2
Sicart, Miguel
  EVE Online ethics, 103
  play as moral interpretation, 9–10, 54
  player-selves, 20, 83, 116n11
Social combat, 26, 28, 36, 37
Sociality, 6, 102. *See also* Real relationships
So Long Sucker, 1–2, 107–109
Stenros, Jaakko, 2, 7, 43, 47, 100, 116n20
Stillman, Stacey, 69
Suits, Bernard, 4, 55
Survival horror games, 53
Survivor, 65–66. See also *Survivor* treacherous play
  ambiguous player relationships, 88
  appeals, 63–64
  attribution theory, 80–81, 83–84, 102–103
  consequential play, 92–93, 122n6
  criticisms, 67
  dishonesty, 9
  dystopian imaginary, 95
  as game, 68–70

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Survivor (cont.)
good treachery, 74–76
Hantz, Russel, 71–75, 81, 84, 102, 122n18
Lacina, Sarah, 78, 82–84
limits on acceptability, 96, 123n12
open communication, 90
play-style gendering, 73, 121n14
play styles vs. real-life identities, 79–85, 102–103
popularity, 63–64, 67, 87
Probst, Jeff, 66, 71, 73, 95
producers' ability to influence, 69
real relationships, 82–83, 101
scholarship on, 121n9
strategic play, 75
transparency, 69–70, 121n12
trust, 5, 75, 77, 81–83, 91, 101
White, Natalie, 72–73
winners, 64–65, 72–74
Survivor treacherous play
as antisocial, 100
bad vs. good, 74, 76–79, 121n15
betrayal, 2–3, 7, 67, 70–78, 94, 100
choice's role in, 78–79
ethics, 76–77, 82, 84, 98
lying, 82
normalization of, 74–75
opportunities for, 67–68
rules, 94
Telic mindsets, 51
Treacherous play, 11. *See also* Assumptions about treacherous play; Betrayal; *DayZ* treacherous play; Design patterns; *EVE Online* scams; *Survivor* treacherous play
as choice, 9–10, 103
deception, 9, 29
emotional experience of, 1–2, 37
enhancing social experiences, 101
examples, 2–3
vs. griefing, 7, 55–56, 100–101
motivations for, 43–49
player culture impacts, 30–31
relationships created by, 101
rules, 93–94
self-exploration, 104–105
successful, 87
Trolling, 118n5
Trust
EVE Online, 5, 31, 38, 60, 91, 96, 122n4
exploiting, 99
games requiring, 90–91
game vs. real, 103
and lusory goals, 5
meaningful, 38
Survivor, 5, 75, 77, 81–83, 91, 101
World of Warcraft, 90
Twenty-One, 68

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Unnecessary obstacles
deception, 9, 29
EVE Online, 29, 36, 116n21
lusory goals, 4–5, 38, 55, 94, 97–98
in sandbox games, 116n21
trust, 5

Valence, 51–52
Violence. *See also* Death in games
mere, 4–6, 55, 59
player distress over, 119n19

Wadley, Greg, 12
Warmelink, Harald, 20
Werewolf, 9, 114n18
White, Natalie, 72–73
Whyville, 116n17, 124n7
World of Warcraft
death and consequences, 27
lusory goals, 5
moderation, 1
relationships between players, 88
sociality, 6–7
trust, 90

Yee, Nick, 44–45, 118n8

Zagal, José, 3–4, 27–29, 55, 97
Zeckhauser, Richard, 5, 77
Zillmann, Dolf, 6, 51
Zimmerman, Eric, 56

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024

Downloaded from http://direct.mit.edu/books/book-pdf/2252869/book_9780262367523.pdf by guest on 21 November 2024